

Oriental Bird Club



Bulletin 37

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June 2003

The Oriental Bird Club aims to:

■ encourage an interest
in the birds of the
Oriental Region and
their conservation

■ liaise with and
promote the work of
existing regional
societies

■ collate and publish
material on
Oriental birds

Two bulletins and a journal,
Forktail, are published annually.

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Membership of OBC

Membership of the Club is open to all and costs £15 per annum (£10 reduced rate for nationals living in Oriental countries who cannot afford the full rate), £20 Family, £25 Supporting Member (funding one Oriental member in addition to ordinary membership), £25 Libraries and academic institutions, and £45 Business Supporters. Special arrangements for payment exist in USA, Thailand and India. To join or for further details please contact the Membership Secretary, Oriental Bird Club, P.O. Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, UK.

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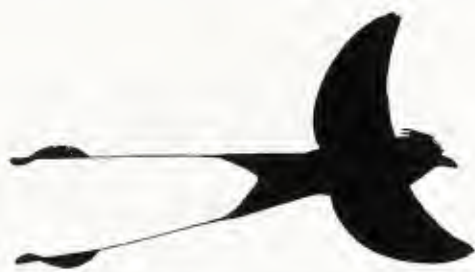
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Cover photo:

Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* by Chris Schenk.



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Letter from the Chairman

Nigel Collar

The Sam Veasna Centre opens

By good chance, work took me to Cambodia at the end of January, and I found myself in Siem Reap on the day of the opening of the Sam Veasna Centre for Wildlife Conservation. It was an evening which brought emotional speeches full of love and respect from Veasna's widow Yada, one of his brothers, and other friends and dignitaries.

The centre is a memorial to Sam Veasna (despite appearances to western eyes, Sam is a Cambodian surname; Veasna was his first name), who died of cerebral malaria at the end of 1999, in his prime as the leading wildlife conservationist of his country (see the obituary by Colin Poole in *Bulletin* 31: 8)—indeed, he had just been awarded the 1999 OBC WildWings Conservation Awareness Award. Brian and Margaret Sykes visited Cambodia soon after his memorial service in February 2000, and presented an OBC plaque in tribute to him (*Bulletin* 31: 3). Veasna had a devotion to birds and to conservation, and was responsible for discovering the major concentration of Bengal Floricans *Houbaropsis bengalensis* in the grasslands and ricefields around Tonle Sap, and the remarkable population of Sarus Cranes *Grus antigone* in Ang Trapeang Thmor in the north of the country. There is a little vignette of three dancing cranes in one of the stone reliefs on the great Angkor Thom temple nearby, and these have very fittingly been adopted as the symbols of the Veasna Centre.

A base from which to promote and coordinate conservation activities in this part of Cambodia was long a dream of Veasna's, and through the generosity of a large number of people who knew him, and the coordination of New York's Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), this has now been brought to life. The centre consists of an entirely new, purpose-made building behind Yada's house in Siem Reap. There is a library (to which OBC has contributed sets of all its publications), meeting room, administrative offices, and rooms for visiting biologists and conservationists. The purpose of the centre is to increase awareness of



WCS-Cambodia director and former OBC Chairman Colin Poole (right), Veasna's widow Yada, and Nigel Collar at the opening of the Sam Veasna Centre. Photo by Karen Hsu

wildlife conservation issues in Cambodia, particularly around Tonle Sap and in the north of the country—something that Veasna considered desperately important—and down the years it will serve as a base for conservation campaigning and research efforts, and for bringing people together to decide strategy and thrash out issues. Already WCS rents office space for its program at Prek Toal (the main area of Tonle Sap for large waterbird colonies), and they are joined by *oSmoSe*, a local organisation which runs school environmental education programmes in the floating villages around Prek Toal, funded through ecotourist visits. Eventually the aim is for the centre to stand on its own feet, producing local language materials to promote environmental awareness throughout the region. As a base for NGOs and fieldworkers—birders who wanted to volunteer their services doing counts and short surveys would doubtless be allowed to stay for very little—and a permanent reference point for biodiversity research and conservation, it is a brilliant way to commemorate Veasna and I wish it a long and successful future. But if Veasna was still with us, it wouldn't exist (or at least it wouldn't exist yet)—and, in that one sense, I have to say I wish it *didn't* exist.

Club News



Recent Club meetings and events

OBC 18th Annual General Meeting, Saturday 30 November 2002

The OBC London Meeting and AGM was held at the Zoological Gardens meeting rooms. The number of members attending the meeting was again disappointing despite another varied and well-presented programme. Those present enjoyed a report on the 'OBC Tour to Tibet' by Mike Edgecombe assisted by Simon Colenutt; Simon Wotton gave a fascinating talk on the study of the enigmatic Jerdon's Courser; and an interesting talk by Phil McGowan on 'Conservation of Asia's Pheasants' rounded off the programme.

On the conservation front, the Chairman announced the annual Forktail-Leica and OBC-WildWings awards and this was followed by an update on the Gurney's Pitta campaign by Brian Sykes.

About 50 members (including Council) attended the AGM itself. David Blakesley, Tim Inskipp, Krys Kazmierczak and Marcus Kohler stood down and Brian Sykes relinquished his role as Secretary under the rules of the Club, but agreed to remain on Council. Phil Benstead (Chairman of the Conservation Committee), Sarah Thomas (Secretary), Jim Wardill (Meetings Officer) and Alan Wilkinson (Internet Officer) were elected to serve on Council for 2003.

The Club's thanks go to all those who helped during the day and to WildSounds for providing their usual comprehensive array of books and other items.

OBC Meetings and Events in 2003:

July 2003: Run for the Birds!

No, not a frantic twitch but a charity run along the north Norfolk coastal path on Saturday 5 July organised by the Oriental Bird Club. This is your chance to get fit and help support the conservation of threatened rainforest within the region. All proceeds will go the Club's conservation funds and will be directed to conservation projects targeted specifically at the preservation of rainforest and its threatened birds. The run will take the form of a relay and Council is hoping that about 40 runners will participate.

If you would like to take part in this fun day please contact Mike Edgecombe on 01362 66897 or <m.edgecombe@virgin.net> for further details.

July 2003: OBC Tour to Tibet – another boost for OBC conservation funds!

Thanks to the enthusiasm and organisational skills of Mike Edgecombe and Jesper Hornskov, the second OBC tour to Tibet is fully booked. Mike is now looking at new ideas for 2004 to build on the success of this new way of fund-raising for the Club's conservation activities.

August 2003: British Bird Watching Fair

The 2003 British Bird Watching Fair will be held between 15 and 17 August at Rutland Water. Publicity Officer Steve Rowland is once more working with the fair organisers to ensure that the Club again presents an energetic profile at the event. It is planned that the uncertain future of Kaleodeo Ghana National Park, Bharatpur, will be the main conservation focus of the Club stand. The prize draw ticket sales team will be in action once again in support of the OBC Conservation Fund. The Club will organise the third and possibly final showing of the quiz game 'Call My Ruff', as well as participating in the 'Bird Brain of Britain' competition. Talks on regional topics will be given on behalf of the Club. Watch out for other Club activities!

The OBC-WildSounds Conservation Cup five-a-side competition will once again provide entertainment – if not classical football skill – for all who care to stay on after the Fair closes on Saturday evening. This event sponsored by OBC book service provider WildSounds is a fundraiser for the Club conservation fund as well as for the winners of the tournament. Sadly the chances of an OBC 'home' win remain remote without an injection of new talent. There are rumours that a team of 'redundant owls' from the Sheffield area may be entered this year, a further threat to the chances of 'Forktail Palace' supremacy. If you want to help in any way, particularly if you believe you are an overlooked footballing talent, please contact Marcus Kohler via the Club.

Forktail 19 is scheduled for publication in August 2003 and will be printed in time for the

2003 Bird Fair. Please will all members visiting the Fair pick up their copy at the Club stand.

As usual Council is looking for volunteers during the event to help on the Club stand, sell draw tickets etc. Please will anyone able to help for half a day (or longer) contact Brian Sykes.

August 2003: Cley Meeting, Sunday 24 August

The late summer meeting on 24 August will be held at Cley Village Hall. As always the meeting is free to all. The doors will open at 11 a.m. The traditional lunchtime curries will be available and an evening BBQ will round off the day for the fourth year running. In addition to a varied range of talks and activities, there will be a last opportunity to purchase draw tickets and the winners will be drawn at the end of the afternoon. WildSounds will be there with their usual comprehensive range of wildlife books, audio and multimedia guides. Other sales stalls are welcome, but prospective vendors must contact the Club before the meeting to make arrangements. It would be a great help to have a few volunteers to assist with set up and food preparation from about 9 a.m. Would anyone prepared to help please contact Brian Sykes.

November 2003: Annual General Meeting, London, Saturday 29 November

The 19th OBC Annual General Meeting will be held at the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) 68-71 Newman Street, London W1T 3AH. Newman Street is a very central location off Oxford Street; the nearest Underground stations are Goodge Street, Oxford Circus and Tottenham Court Road. Council decided to change to this smaller, more economical venue as a result of the poor attendance at recent London meetings. **Please make a note of the date and the new venue now.** It's a good time to do some Christmas shopping, so why not make a day of it? Council hopes to welcome more members and friends to this year's event.

Club Announcements: OBC Book Service

The Club book service is operated by WildSounds. The prime objective is to provide a first-class competitive service for members, but Council also asks members to support the service as it benefits the Club's conservation fund when members make a purchase. WildSounds attend all Club events/meetings and this benefits the fund too.

If you want to order goods in advance of meetings, please contact WildSounds by E-mail:

<sales@wildsounds.com> or phone (UK) 01263 741 100.

OBC Prize Draw 2003

The annual Prize Draw is still the mainstay of the annual conservation fundraising effort. In 2003 the main prize is the new Leica APO-Televid 62 Telescope with zoom eyepiece, valued at about £1,000. London Camera Exchange (Winchester) Ltd has donated a £100 voucher and *Handbook of birds of the world (Vol 8)* has been donated by Lynx. There is the usual extensive and varied selection of books as runner-up prizes.

A book of ten draw tickets (tickets are priced at £1.00) is included with this Bulletin for Club members with a UK postal address. **The draw is not restricted to the UK! Members living outside the UK may send payment (GBP £1.00 for each ticket) by GBP cheque or credit card (Mastercard or Visa) to OBC Prize Draw, P.O. Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, U.K.** Tickets in your name will go into the draw.

Ticket stubs and remittances returned by mail should be posted in time to arrive at the Club post box not later than Friday 8 August. Tickets will be on sale at the BBWF and at the Cley meeting. The draw takes place at the OBC Cley meeting on 24 August.

Please will members make a big effort to sell tickets to friends and colleagues, extra tickets are available from the Club – contact Brian Sykes.

Gift Aid Declarations – thanks again!

Thanks to the members paying tax in the U.K. who signed Gift Aid Declarations in favour of the Club, a cheque for £2,493 was received from the U.K. tax authorities for the year ending 5 April 2002. It is never too late to join in the scheme if you have not yet done so. All you have to do is to fill out a form once! Please contact the Treasurer to get a form.

UK Members can help the Club via 'Give as You Earn'

Any U.K. based employer may participate in this scheme, under which their employees can make a monthly donation to charity and receive immediate tax relief. For example, a £10 monthly donation will mean only £7.80 less in your pay packet (only £6.00 less if you pay tax at the higher rate) and the government adds 10% so that the Club will receive £11. Council would like to thank member Paul Bamford who has started contributing to such a scheme. If you would like to help the Club this way, please contact the

Treasurer, who can supply full details, or visit www.giveasyouearn.org.

Help wanted!

Council is always looking for new volunteers to help in a variety of ways. Any commitment, from half a day's work at an event such as BBWF or a Club meeting, or helping behind the scenes with operations such as Conservation Committee, Finance Committee, Publications Committee, or Image Database, to becoming a member of Council is very welcome. Right now as noted above, we are specifically looking for help at 2003 events and with the OBC Image Database. In addition we would like to hear from anyone interested in joining Council. There are two roles we would like to fill: Publicity and Membership Development. We would like to hear from anyone who feels they have the skills and time to join Council and take on one of these roles.

Advertise in the OBC Bulletin

Council would like to thank all the organisations advertising regularly in the OBC Bulletin. Advertisements help to offset the cost of production and the benefit to the Club from this is significant. The standard Bulletin advertisement rates [black & white] are: full page £135; half page £85; quarter page £60. Colour advertisements are available at extra cost. Please contact Richard Thomas.

How to contact the Club:

All Council members may be contacted via E-mail at mail@orientalbirdclub.org or via the post box: Oriental Bird Club, P.O. Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, U.K.

OBC on the Internet

Save time & cost – rejoin 'online'

The Club is now able to offer members the option to rejoin online using a secure credit card facility. Simply visit the Club website www.orientalbirdclub.org, click on 'Join OBC' and follow the steps.

Promote the Website!

The website is packed with information on all aspects of the Club of interest to new and existing members. Please tell your friends to take a look. The website has simple links to allow visitors to sign up to the E-mail discussion groups *OrientalBirding* and *OrientalBirdingPix*. Click on 'Directory' and then on 'E-mail Groups'. Both groups are free. Why not give them a try?

OBC Image Database

The new OBC Image Database is growing steadily and now features some 3,000 stunning photographs of over 1,300 species. This too, is easily accessed via the website: click on the 'OBC Image Database' link. Council is very grateful to Krys Kazmierczak, Vijay Cavale and Tom Tarrant for their hard work in creating the database. If anyone is interested in joining the team administering the project, or contributing photographs, please contact Krys Kazmierczak: krys@krys.net

E-mail the Club

Use mail@orientalbirdclub.org to notify your address change, membership renewal, sales order, general enquiries and to contact any member of Council. Articles and manuscripts for the Club publications may also be submitted. Please ensure that all attachments sent to the Club are virus-free. If you have any doubts about the system you use, please mail a hard copy as back-up.

OBC sales

A new sales leaflet will be circulated to members with the 2003 AGM papers. The full range of sales items, including new additions and updates, is displayed on the website.

Trip reports

The trip reports available from the Club are continually reviewed and revised as new reports are received. The Club is always grateful to receive new trip reports for sale and our thanks go to all those who have donated reports. All profits from the sale of trip reports go to the Conservation Fund.

T-shirts and sweatshirt designs

There are good stocks of the OBC Rhinoceros Hornbill T-shirt. This is based on an original painting by Martin Woodcock and marks a departure from previous designs being printed on an olive-green shirt. It is featured on the Club website.

The range of T-shirts and sweatshirts featuring the Club 'Forktail' logo and the caption 'Oriental Bird Club' on the left breast continue to be popular with members. The T-shirts are available in bottle green, royal blue or teal. The sweatshirts are available in bottle green, royal blue and light grey. All the above are available in three sizes, medium, large and extra large. There are good stocks of the 'Magical Birds of Thailand' T-shirt, a montage of nine species by Kamol Komolphalin. It is produced in unbleached preshrunk cotton. Two

sizes are available, medium and large (up to 44" chest).

Other items available include back numbers of publications and the OBC Regional Checklist.

All items are available by mail order or E-mail.

General announcements:

Bharatpur Centenary Celebrations.

There is no further indication when the 100th birthday celebrations of the world-famous Keoladeo Ghana National Park located at Bharatpur will be held. As many members will know, India has suffered severe water problems over the last two years due to the failure of the monsoon. Rajasthan has been particularly badly affected, and at the present time, the park is very dry. It is unlikely that there will be a celebration

until conditions return to normal and much therefore in the short term depends on the 2003 monsoon, the full effect of which will not be clear until late September. The Club still intends to attend any event and will keep in touch with the situation. As soon as there is anything to report, the information will be published on the website and *Oriental Birding*.

Nepal Rare Birds Committee formed

The Club has been pleased to receive news of the formation of the Nepal Rare Birds Committee from Carol Inskipp. Full details of the committee and its objectives appear in 'Stray Feathers'.

Gurney's Pitta Campaign update

General and political

As previously reported there have been big changes over the last six months in the political landscape responsible for the administration of protected areas in Thailand and therefore pertinent to the struggle to save Gurney's Pitta. The restructuring of the Thai Civil Service has dragged on and this has caused a series of problems whilst the new organisation has been put in place. Specifically there was a big delay in implementing the planned patrolling regime at a critical time due to the lack of clarity of lines of responsibility and authority. The reality of the situation is that there have been few changes in the senior officials responsible for implementing policy, so whether the new organisation proves to be more dynamic and responsive than the last remains to be seen. At the present time there are some potentially promising signs.

There has been substantial activity as a result of the RSPB intervention to help save the species reported in Bulletin 36. The first step involved holding a wide-ranging workshop attended by all stakeholders including village and local government representatives as well as the government agencies and NGOs. This resulted in all parties agreeing that a steering committee be set up to progress the recovery programme and to ensure that the interests of all parties were fully taken into account. A public meeting was then held in late January 2003, when the general

agreements were unveiled to a forum of villagers, local officials and civil servants in the presence of national and local press representatives. The role of OBC over the last three years in maintaining awareness of the problems and in seeking ways forward has been recognised and the Club has been given the same status as the RSPB as advisor to the steering committee.

Most recently, 24 April, the first meeting of the steering committee was held at site. It was planned that Uthai Treesucon would represent OBC, but unfortunately he was ultimately unable to attend. It was a largely symbolic affair, but the attendance of the Krabi Deputy Governor as well as Privy Councillor Ampol sent a strong signal of commitment at senior government levels. How the operation of the steering committee develops remains to be seen, as does the future role of OBC.

Developments at site

Unfortunately the present dry season has been marked by the most serious 'land grab' for several years. Whether this is coincidence or because those concerned saw it as opportune thanks to the start-up of a new foreign-backed intervention is not clear. Clearance has been widespread and carried out by large-scale 'speculators', by settlers entering the area for the first time, and by small farmers extending their existing plots. One very large new clearance by one of the speculators was photographed by the news media at the time of

the public meeting and received national publicity. At the same time a worker clearing another site for a speculator was arrested and the bulldozer he was driving was impounded. Since then the OBC-funded enhanced patrolling has commenced and latest information indicates that it is having a beneficial effect.

Although new clearings may have been halted (at least temporarily) the total cessation of new clearance and the interception of new settlers before they take root continues to be a vital top priority. OBC will continue to lobby for this.

Plans are being developed by WWF Thailand to demarcate settlers' agricultural land in exchange for undertakings from them to cease further clearance. This may be of real benefit, particularly in the longer term, but only if it is backed up by effective patrolling and effective legal action against any who break such agreements.

The environmental awareness training camps for school students in the Klong Thom area run by BCST and funded by OBC have continued and will be completed shortly. It is hoped that these may be repeated in future as local initiatives run by the Klong Thom Rajrangson School.

OBC and WCS have organised a site visit by Steve Elliott of Forest Restoration Research Unit, Chiang Mai University (FORRU) & George Gale of King Mongkut's University of Technology, Bioresources and Technology Department, to make a preliminary survey of re-forestation issues and problems. OBC is funding the May 2003 visit and report.

OBC is funding Yotin Meekaeo to carry out the 'Human Use Survey' again in 2003 on the same basis as in 2001 and 2002 over the same six-month period.

The BCST-RSPB research programme has commenced under RSPB guidance. A Thai research worker recruited and employed by BCST as part of the BCST-RSPB project is participating in the fieldwork. So far in 2003, nine Gurney's Pitta territories have been located adjacent to the trail system, and comparison with the OBC-funded survey of 2000 suggests that the 2003 breeding population remains very similar to that in 2000. The major concern is what effect the most recent clearances have had on the territories outside the core area.

OBC would again like to thank the staff of WCS Thailand and WWF Thailand for their help and cooperation over the last few quite difficult

months. It is good news that NGOs based in Thailand are now so committed to the project.

Fundraising

The Club continues to have offers of support yet to be taken up which will prove most valuable as plans unfold. Generous members continue to send in contributions and others still devise ingenious ways of raising funds. Thanks to OBC member Dylan Thomas, the children of Peak School, Victoria Peak, Hong Kong, raised over HK\$ 19,000 to help the campaign. Dylan held an assembly of the school's 320 children (aged 4-11) and talked about Gurney's Pitta and its plight, and he organised a colouring competition to decorate and construct coin boxes to collect the money.

A prize was awarded for the best-coloured box and another to the person who collected most money. Great work Dylan, many thanks!

Brian Sykes

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Conservation Fund

Compiled by Phil Benstead with contributions from Mike Crosby, Mark Gurney, Geoff Hilton, Carol Inskipp and Phil McGowan.

GRANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Status and reproductive ecology of Giant Babax

Giant Babax *Babax waddelli* is a poorly known species of the Southern Tibet Endemic Bird Area. It is currently listed as Near-threatened, because within its restricted range the alpine scrub that it inhabits is gradually being cleared. Lu Xin has been awarded a Small Grant to investigate its status, habitat requirements and nest-site selection. The study will take place near Lhasa, in the part of Tibet with the largest human population and the most rapidly developing economy. The project will improve understanding of the ecology of Giant Babax, and the impact of habitat loss. Although local people never kill wildlife because of their Buddhist beliefs, they are usually not aware of the indirect impact that excessive cutting of vegetation can have on the babax and other wildlife. The results of the project will therefore be presented in articles in the local media, as well as in scientific papers for ornithological journals, with suggestions on how to improve the protection of the species's habitat.

Conservation of Pallas's Fish Eagle in selected areas of the north-eastern Region of Bangladesh

A recent survey found 15 pairs of Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* in 13 villages in Sunamgonj District in Bangladesh. This area previously held much higher numbers, and an OBC-funded small project led by the Centre for Natural Resource Studies will try to increase the availability of nesting sites by providing artificial platforms for the birds. Use of the platforms will be carefully monitored to assess their effectiveness, and they should stimulate interest in the species amongst local people.

Protection of the highly endangered Indian Bustard in and around Sonkhalia Bustard Area, Ajmer, Rajasthan, India



Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* by Nik Borrow

R. S. Rathore has been awarded a Small Grant to conduct a conservation awareness campaign at Sonkhalia. The Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* is one of the most charismatic bird species of the oriental region; it is also one of the most threatened, with a declining population thought to number no more than 500–600 individuals. The Bombay Natural History Society has undertaken substantial conservation work for the species in western Rajasthan in recent years, but less attention has been paid to Ajmer District in eastern Rajasthan. The Sonkhalia Bustard Closed Area in Ajmer was designated in the 1980s specifically for Indian Bustard protection and covers c. 500 km². However, since designation, the population in the area is thought to have declined from around 50–60 individuals to around 30–35. This is primarily ascribed to continued poaching and to changing cropping patterns. The applicant intends to conduct an environmental education programme in the villages surrounding the Bustard Area. This will involve enlisting the support of village elders, leaders, teachers and poachers, and the formation of village-level bustard protection groups. It is hoped that this will lead to a reduction in poaching, and increased interest in, and support for, bustard conservation.

Pitta – Newsletter for birdwatchers in Telugu

The Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh (BSAP) has been publishing *Pitta* – a monthly newsletter in English – since 1987. It reports on bird sightings, news, events, and conservation in the state, but has so far been limited to the English-speaking audience in Andhra Pradesh.

BSAP has been awarded a Conservation Awareness Small Grant of £625 to start the production of a Telugu language version of the newsletter. This will not be a direct translation of the English version: instead it will be aimed more at the budding, rather than seasoned, birdwatcher. This excellent initiative aims to develop a support base for wildlife conservation in Andhra Pradesh using Telugu as the language of communication. It will provide a forum for Telugu-speaking birdwatchers to share their observations with each other, and contribute to the generation of a database on bird sightings and behaviour observations through reader reportage. The Telugu *Pitta* will be produced bi-monthly and will include descriptions of key species, Important Bird Areas and Protected Areas in the State. It will also incorporate sections on 'Getting to Know Birds', getting readers involved in bird data collection, and news on significant happenings in the birding world.

Awareness for bird conservation in Nagaland in north-east India



Just to prove that you can't keep a good conservationist down, Dr Anwaruddin Choudhury has followed up his recent Forktail-Leica award for research on Mrs Hume's Pheasant *Syrnaticus humiae* by winning the 2002 WildWings Conservation Awareness Award of £1,000. He intends to undertake a project that will raise conservation awareness in the small (17,000 km²) north-east Indian state of Nagaland which is a crucially important region for biodiversity, forming part of a Global Biodiversity Hotspot and the Eastern Himalaya Endemic Bird Area. With over 480 species recorded, including globally threatened White-bellied Heron *Ardea insignis*, White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*, Blyth's Tragopan *Tragopan blythii*, Mrs Hume's Pheasant *Syrnaticus humiae*,

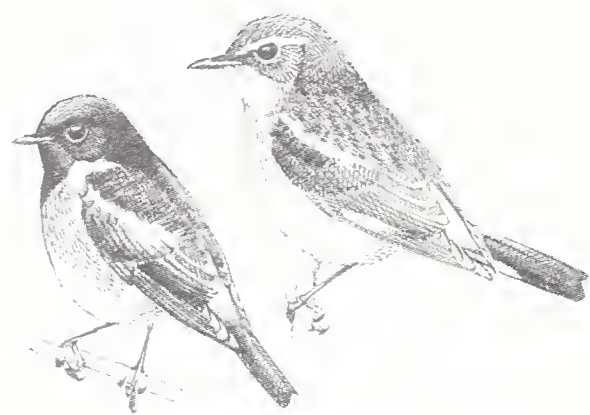
Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, and Wood Snipe *Gallinago nemoricola*, it is a critically

important area for bird conservation. However, conservation awareness in the state is extremely low: it is the only state in India where wild birds are openly and regularly sold in the markets, often in large numbers, for food. The idea for this project arose out of efforts made by Dr Choudhury in recent years to reduce bird killing by talking to both local authorities and villagers. These efforts had considerable success in reducing the killing of rarer species. Now Dr Choudhury will produce an illustrated book on the birds of Nagaland, with the aim of popularising birds, especially among the young. The book will be complemented by informal awareness-raising discussions in villages in priority areas.

Mrs Hume's Pheasant *Syrnaticus humiae* by Hil Bruinsma.

Conservation of Stoliczka's Bushchat in Sindh, Pakistan

The Stoliczka's Bushchat *Saxicola macrorhyncha* is globally Vulnerable, due to its small, declining population; it is found only in an area of north-western India and south-eastern Pakistan. The main threat to this desert specialist is agricultural intensification



Stoliczka's Bushchat *Saxicola macrorhyncha* (with Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* below) by Carl d'Silva.

Sacred groves of Cherrapunjee, Meghalaya, India: an evaluation of their avifaunal diversity and present conservation status

and encroachment. Asad Rahmani of the Bombay Natural History Society has recently reported good numbers of the species in the Indian section of the Thar Desert, so there is an urgent need to determine the status of the species in the Pakistani section, in order that conservation measures can be taken. Bakhtyaware Khan has been awarded a Small Grant to survey the distribution and conservation status of the species in Sindh province of Pakistan, and to examine potential threats to the species. Data will be gathered through monthly roadside counts and line transects, as well as through literature review, examination of museum specimens and interviews with local interest groups.

Mohammad Firoz Ahmed has been awarded a Small Grant to investigate the avifauna of the sacred groves and evergreen forest of Cherrapunjee, in Meghalaya State in north-east India. He will evaluate the social status of the sacred groves and anthropogenic threats to them, and propose conservation measures. Cherrapunjee is one of the wettest places on earth: over 24 m of precipitation fell in 1974! The vegetation has a *shola*-like appearance – with areas of grassland are interspersed with forest patches. The local people regard most of the patches as 'sacred groves'. However, ecologists believe that this landscape has emerged due to deforestation and traditional *jhum* cultivation in the past. A survey in 2001 recorded the globally Vulnerable Dark-rumped Swift *Apus acuticauda* and more than 50 other species of bird in the sacred groves and evergreen forest patches in Cherrapunjee. Despite the spiritual values with which they are invested, the sacred groves are under considerable pressure. The groves are thought to provide substantial watershed protection, but rainfall has been declining since the 1970s, potentially degrading the ecosystem. Tree-felling by local people for firewood is causing an alarming loss of forest.

Line transects and point counts will be used to assess the avifauna in sacred groves. Local people will be interviewed for additional information. The frequency of human interference will also be estimated, and local people will be interviewed for information on changes in the social status of the sacred groves.

Conservation Awareness Programme, through field visits to Sundarban Tiger Reserve, West Bengal, India, for school students of villages on the periphery of the reserve

The Sundarban Tiger Reserve covers an area of 2,585 km² of mangrove forests interspersed with water channels. Globally threatened species such as Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*, Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*, White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* and Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* are known to be present, while Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis*, Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmeus* and Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata* may also occur. A Small Grant has been awarded to the Association for Social and Environmental Development (ASED), to raise awareness about flora and fauna among students in villages adjoining the Reserve. The Reserve is world-famous, and receives thousands of visitors each year. In contrast, local villagers – who are key stakeholders in the Reserve's future – usually have no access to the forests near their village, and have little understanding of the Sundarbans ecosystem. The project will introduce these students to the flora and fauna of the Sundarban mangroves and make them aware of the threats this ecosystem faces and ways to conserve it.

ASED will work in collaboration with the Sundarban Project Tiger authorities to deliver an interpretation programme for school students (mainly in the 10–14 years age group) and teachers. School students will be taken on boat trips to the interior of the reserve to see and learn about the flora and fauna as well as the threats to the reserve.

Protection of Indian Bustard in Punjab, Pakistan

A second Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* project has been awarded a Small Grant, reflecting the increased concern for the future of this species. Surveys conducted during recent breeding seasons indicate that a population of about 60 individuals breeds annually in the Cholistan desert, but the hunting mortality of these birds is thought to be extremely high. Most of the birds breed in a small area, which appears to be the core of the species's breeding range in Punjab. There is an urgent need to declare this area as a wildlife sanctuary. The species is hunted mainly for its perceived aphrodisiac qualities. Dr Aleem Ahmed Khan believes that protection of the species is weak largely due a lack of awareness of its threatened status, and plans to raise awareness among locals, neighbouring city dwellers, and decision makers, with the ultimate goal of declaring the area as the 'Bijnor Bustard Sanctuary' (named after the main village of the area). The project will involve media work, production of educational materials, on-site community gatherings, posters and signboard installation near the important area, and a campaign to convince and involve provincial wildlife department staff and decision makers.

Design of long-term bird monitoring system for Sariska Tiger Reserve in the Aravalli Hills of north-western India

Long-term biodiversity monitoring schemes are a crucial tool for biological conservation, but are all too rare in most of Asia. In a very welcome new development, a Small Grant has been awarded to Dr Ghazala Shahabuddin to develop a bird monitoring scheme in Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan. The reserve covers 866 km² in the Aravalli Hills of north-western India, and comprises the last remnants of native scrub and dry deciduous forest that exist in the area. It harbours a rich diversity of flora and fauna including several globally threatened bird species. It is an Important Bird Area, and 225 species have been recorded to date. Removal of wood for fuel and vegetation for fodder is a considerable conservation problem, although this is overshadowed by the threat of quarrying, which is causing drastic changes in the ground-water regime of the entire region.

The project aims to compile a comprehensive list of bird species in the reserve, and to design a long-term bird monitoring system. An initial wide-ranging survey will identify the variety of habitats found inside the reserve, particularly those with which threatened bird species are associated. One site within each habitat type will then be selected for systematic observations and long-term monitoring. The emphasis will be on developing quick and inexpensive methods for bird monitoring that will cover the entire range of habitats present in Sariska. Financial resources for subsequent implementation of the bird monitoring scheme are being sought from elsewhere. It is planned that workshops will be organised in Sariska involving local bird experts, NGOs, birdwatching guides, and forest department officials. Local biology

students and graduates who can be employed as birdwatching guides inside the reserve will be targeted for training.

An assessment of changes in population of endemic birds in the Upper Palnis of the Western Ghats, India, through bird banding

Status assessments of birds can be greatly increased in value if there is an historical baseline with which to compare them. S. Balachandran and N. Ezhilarasi plan to take advantage of earlier bird banding programmes to assess changes in bird populations in an area of the Western Ghats. The Western Ghats are an important biodiversity hotspot and Endemic Bird Area. The Upper Palnis lie at 2,000–2,600 m asl. The area is characterised by a range of natural habitats, primarily moist deciduous, semi-evergreen, evergreen and *shola* forest, with various stages of anthropogenic degradation. In addition, wattle, pine, and bluegum plantations are present. The area supports populations of many of the key Western Ghats endemics, such as Grey-breasted Laughingthrush *Garrulax jerdoni*, Black-and-Orange Flycatcher *Ficedula nigrorufa*, White-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx major*, Nilgiri flycatcher *Eumyias albicaudata*, Nilgiri Wood Pigeon *Columba elphinstonii*, Crimson-backed Sunbird *Nectarinia minima* and Rufous Babbler *Turdoides subrufus*.

In the Palni Hills, bird-banding data exist for four summer seasons (1970, 1982, 1984 & 1990). Preliminary analysis of these data shows major changes in bird community structure due to habitat alteration. This study will attempt to assess changes up to the present day, by conducting further mist-netting in the same areas. There will also be a possibility of assessing the breeding success of endemic birds in relation to habitat alteration (through looking at adult to juvenile ratios). The study will hopefully lead to useful conservation prioritisation for the Upper Palnis in relation to the endemic species.

Cheer Pheasant survey, Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve, Nepal

A Small Grant of £500 has been donated to Poorneshwor Subedi to contribute towards a survey of the globally threatened Cheer Pheasant *Catreus wallichii* in Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve in west Nepal. The species was found to be fairly common at Dhorpatan in a survey carried out in 1981, but no further surveys have been made in the area and no recent information is available. Elsewhere in Nepal the species now appears to be very locally distributed and there are few recent records. This survey should fill an important gap in our knowledge of the current status of the species in Nepal. The project will be carried out between February and July 2003.

Study of vultures in Royal Sukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve, Nepal

This survey of White-rumped Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* and Slender-billed Vultures *Gyps tenuirostris* in Royal Sukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve in the lowlands of south-west Nepal is a follow-up to an OBC-funded survey carried out by Jeet Bahadur Giri at Sukla Phanta last year. The same sites will be visited and the same methods used to enable the vulture populations to be monitored. The study will be carried out between November 2002 and May 2003. Regular field visits will be made throughout the period. The reserve currently has good populations of both species although there is some evidence that they are declining. An OBC Small Grant of £500 will fully fund this study which will be carried out jointly by Som G.C. and Jeet Bahadur Giri.

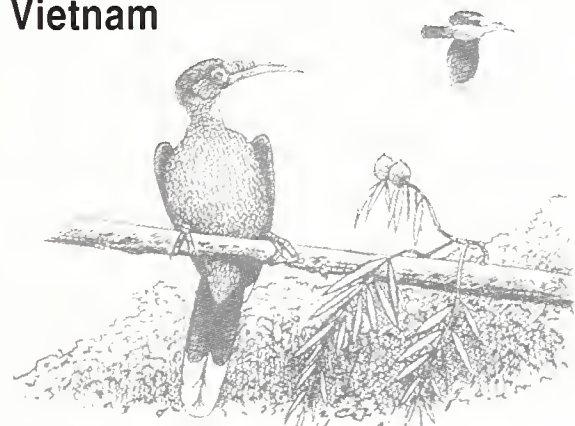
Malasi Lakes Student Monitoring Project, Luzon, Philippines

The Malasi Lakes of Luzon Island in the Philippines support large numbers of wintering wildfowl, including over 1,000 Philippine Ducks *Anas luzonica*. The lakes were declared a municipal bird sanctuary in 2002 but infringements of its protection status are common. Isabela State University has set up the Malasi Lakes Student Monitoring Project to provide data on the status of waterbirds and encourage undergraduate conservation projects. Every two weeks students will use fixed point counts to survey the wildfowl and environmental data will be used to interpret the results. OBC is supporting the project through a Small Grant which will pay for three student bursaries for transport, subsistence, and research costs.

A survey of threatened birds in remnant forest in southern Negros, Philippines

Lisa Marie Paguntalan and three other birders have been awarded a Small Grant to survey Canaway and Hapon-haponon Forests in Negros. The remnant forest in this area supports many threatened species, including Rufous-headed Hornbill *Aceros waldeni*, Rufous-colored Kingfisher *Todiramphus winchelli*, and Flame-templed Babbler *Stachyris speciosa*, and may hold Ashy-breasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa randi* and Negros Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus arcanus*, the latter of which has only been recorded in the wild on one occasion. The survey will attempt to assess the status of these birds and identify the most important forest areas for their conservation.

Building a foundation for the conservation of Rufous-necked Hornbill in Che Tao commune, Mucangchai district, Yen Bai province, Vietnam



Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis* by Craig Robson.



LEICA



Sarus Crane status and population structure in Rakhine State, Myanmar

The winner of the 2002 Forktail-Leica Award is this project which will focus on the conservation of a small population of Rufous-necked Hornbills *Aceros nipalensis* in Vietnam. Rufous-necked Hornbill is a globally threatened species, found in small numbers throughout its range, and the population at Che Tao is probably the last viable one in Vietnam. This project aims to assess the current population size, identify the principal threats to the birds' habitat, and raise awareness of the importance of the hornbill amongst local people. The site will be surveyed between March and August and other threatened bird species will be recorded as well as the hornbill itself (the area is also home to Broad-billed Warbler *Tickellia hodgsoni* and Yellow-billed Nuthatch *Sitta solangiae*). The project team includes two members of forestry staff, Le Thi Hien and Hoan Xuan Hai, who will be trained in field survey techniques by the two other members, Le Manh Hung and Nguyen Manh Ha. By involving local communities and the forest management board, the project should fit in with the on-going community conservation projects at Che Tao.

Tin Nwe Latt is studying Sarus Cranes *Grus antigone* for her PhD at Yangon University. Her study in the Ayeyarwady Delta highlighted the importance of agricultural areas for the conservation of this species, and she is now continuing her work by looking at the population in Rakhine State. She will investigate the seasonal changes in population size and structure and the bird's habitat preferences, as she did in her first study. Together with her data from Ayeyarwady, this will greatly improve our understanding of the Sarus Crane in Myanmar.

Preliminary survey of White-rumped Vultures in Southern Shan States, Myanmar

Tony Htin Hla saw about forty White-rumped Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* in the Southern Shan States, Myanmar, in 1997, one of the largest groups to have been seen in South-East Asia in recent years. Reports since then suggest that the birds are still in the area. Tony has received a Small Grant to return to the area and search for the birds, and determine their status and habitat.

CONSERVATION FUND REPORTS OF GRANT-ASSISTED WORK

Bird poster and *Panchhi* bulletin publication for conservation awareness in Chitwan, Nepal

An OBC Small Grant funded part of the Bird Education Society's (BES) on-going conservation awareness programme in Chitwan, Nepal. The Royal Chitwan National Park (RCNP) is important for the conservation of many threatened species including Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis* and Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilus javanicus*. However, the rich biodiversity of the park and its buffer zone is under threat primarily due to lack of conservation education in local communities.

BES conducts a conservation awareness programme in schools and the community at Chitwan. This project focuses on distributing *Panchhi*, the environmental magazine published by BES, and a bird poster. In total, 1,500 copies of the poster featuring 12 colourful bird species illustrated by famous Nepali bird artist Hira Lal Dogol, were published. It was considered more fruitful to depict birds commonly seen around the schools and villages: Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*, Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*, Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*, Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*, Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, Blue-throated Barbet *Megalaima asiatica*, Common Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*, Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*, Lesser Adjutant, Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis*, Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* and White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*.

A total of 600 copies of *Panchhi* was published. *Panchhi* includes news about the activities of BES and articles about birds and wildlife including environmental issues.

The bird posters and *Panchhi* were displayed in all the classrooms of the seven local schools that are located within the buffer zone area of RCNP. While distributing the posters, they were shown to the students and discussions about the birds were initiated. BES members encouraged the children to protect the birds and their habitat. The children were very keen to know more about the birds. They actively participated by giving information about birds that they knew. Similar discussions were held with local communities in Chitwan's buffer zone when distributing the posters. Participants in schools and communities were eager to know more about birds, their habitats and their importance in conservation of the environment. In addition, bird posters were distributed to other schools and communities outside the buffer zone as well as to environmental organisations and institutions and nature lovers throughout Nepal, including the Institute of Forestry campus, Hetauda, Bird Conservation Nepal, members of BES, libraries and the RCNP buffer zone.

Om Bdr Rijal, Bird Conservation Nepal,
P.O. Box 12465, Lazimpat, Kathmandu, Nepal

Survey of Kerala wetlands, India

An OBC grant of £500 funded brief surveys of 22 wetlands distributed throughout Kerala state, south-west India, in 2001. Eighty-six species of shore- and other water-birds were recorded on the entire survey, with a mean of about 13 species at each site. Half were residents, or possible residents, and the rest migrants from the Palearctic: mainly shorebirds. The most widespread species were Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*, Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia*, Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* and Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*, all of which were seen at most sites. One species listed by BirdLife International (2001) as Threatened: Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus*, and five listed as Near-threatened: Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda*, Grey-headed Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*, Darter *Anhinger melanogaster*, Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* and Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*, were recorded. Most species occurred at only one or two localities, but Darter was recorded at seven localities and Black-headed Ibis was seen at five localities. The total population of Kerala for these species may constitute significant fractions of the world population, currently estimated, respectively, at 4,000 and 10,000 birds. Darter has declined significantly in Kerala in the past three decades.

Numbers of resident species recorded at different localities may give some sense of how important different sites are for waterbirds. However, as the surveys were spread throughout the year, they did not provide useful comparisons for migrants. The greatest diversity of resident species was found at Periyar and Kumarakom, two sites that were subjected to more observations than others. However, with 24 and 27 species, respectively, these two sites clearly provide important waterbird habitat. Periyar Lake forms part of the Periyar Project Tiger Reserve and hence is fully protected. Kumarakom is designated as a bird sanctuary and has some protection, but is subject to considerable disturbance because of local tourism development, and requires further protection. We propose the establishment of two further sanctuaries, but we note that wetlands in Kerala are so fragmented that sanctuaries are unlikely to protect more than a fraction of the state's waterbirds.

Dr V.J. Zacharias and Dr A.J. Gaston

Munal (quarterly newsletter in Nepali Language)

Two OBC Small Grants of £500 have enabled the non-governmental organisation Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) to publish eight issues of their quarterly newsletter, *Munal* in the Nepali language.

The objectives of the newsletter are to create public interest in birds and their conservation; to provide facts about birds and their habitats; to give a brief introduction to the activities of BCN and other organisations working on bird conservation and to disseminate the various findings of bird research projects. BCN has found that publishing and distributing *Munal* is an excellent way of conveying messages on conservation and the activities of BCN to the general public who can only read or understand Nepali.

Munal has issued 1,000 copies of each issue over the last two years. These have been distributed to schools, colleges, public libraries, Government offices, private and public organisations, business houses, UN agencies in Nepal, NGOs, INGOs, and

embassies in Nepal etc. The articles and layout of *Munal* have gradually improved as more issues have been published.

A recent BCN survey found that *Munal* is a good starting point to generate public interest in birds and their conservation and that demand for *Munal* has increased. Indeed, it now reaches at least 10,000 people! It is especially targeted at school children, the first two issues being distributed to schools throughout Nepal. Later BCN started receiving comments and interest from parents and teachers and others who had had the opportunity to read the newsletter. As a result, BCN's Executive Council decided to circulate *Munal* to other organisations and offices in addition to schools.

Featured articles have covered topics such as the number of species of birds that have been recorded in the country so far, information about the Spiny Babbler *Turdoides nipalensis*, Nepal's only endemic bird species, and information on globally threatened species that are found in Nepal. Another recent article describes birdwatching in and around Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve, which is famous as an internationally important site, where 463 species have been so far recorded.

The newsletter has been widely referred to by the Nepali media including Radio Nepal, Sagarmatha FM and national dailies such as *Rajdhani*).

Bhesh Raj Ghimire, Editor, Bird Conservation Nepal, PO Box 12465, Lazimpat, Kathmandu, Nepal

Home study course in ornithology, Rishi Valley Education Centre, Arunachal Pradesh, India

An OBC Small Grant of £500 helped to fund an ornithology course at the Rishi Valley Education Centre for 2001/2002. Another award, Green Teacher 2001 given by Sanctuary Asia, was pooled with the OBC funds. The course's objectives include the raising of awareness amongst all sections of people, especially youth, of the imperative need for the protection of birds and their habitats in particular, and biodiversity in general, and the conservation of nature and natural resources. The course, which was launched in April 1998, is an on-going project and the number of enrolments from the course's inception to 31 December 2002 is 546. The OBC grant enabled us to offer more scholarships to deserving students, to partly meet the expenses of publishing more study material and to add more reference books on ornithology to the library. The course has received students from all parts of the country, which is a very gratifying development. It attracts students of all ages and a wide range of backgrounds including a doctor from Assam, housewives, and many young people. Feedback from those taking part has been very encouraging. Many leading naturalists and ornithologists have commended the efforts of the Centre, notably Mr. Zafar Futehally, well-known naturalist and editor of *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* in the May/June 2001 issue of the newsletter.

A total of 25 lessons is sent by post, followed by a mid-course test paper on completion of three months of the course, and a final test paper on completion of six months. Courses begin on the first of each month (except for May and November), making ten courses in all in a year. Several students and staff members continue to take part in weekend birdwatching sessions. For instance a group of 16 students and five staff members took part in a nature camp in Sikkim in April 2002. During 2001–2002, 108 students enrolled for

the course; 60 have completed the course and obtained their certificates. The rest are at various stages of progress.

*S. Rangaswami, Director, Institute of Bird Studies & Natural History,
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Green-billed Coucal in Sri Lanka

A generous grant of £765 provided by Limosa funded a survey of the range and distribution of Green-billed Coucal *Centropus chlororhynchos*, a rare endemic species in Sri Lanka. The study was carried out between October 1997 and May 1999.

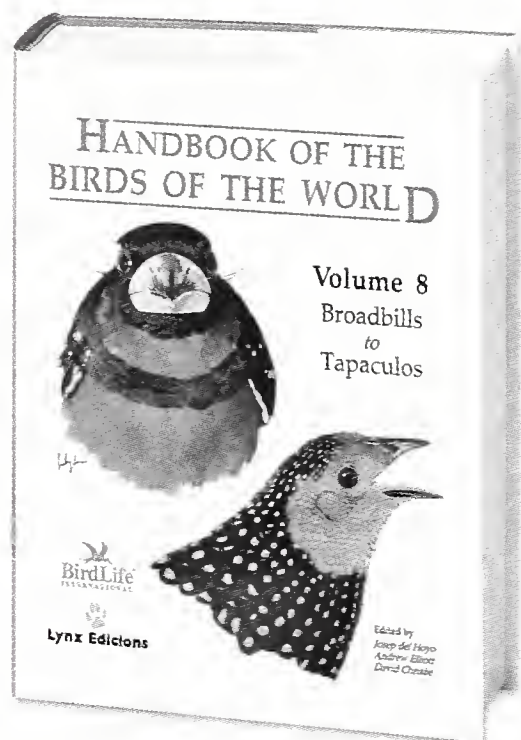
Green-billed Coucal is generally a shy and wary bird that occurs in wet evergreen forest up to 1,000 m in the wet zone in the south-west of the island, where it was formerly considered to be common. It mainly inhabits the dense understorey that usually consists of bamboo spp. *Davidsea attenuata*, *Ochlandra stridula*, *Pseudoxytenanthera monadelphica* and other luxuriant herbage, such as tree ferns *Cyathea* spp. and cane *Calamus* spp.

The forests visited were selected from one-inch topographical maps of the wet and intermediate zones, which were assumed to contain the habitat preferred by the species. Of these, a number of forest patches which are marked on the maps as natural forest areas have since been converted to forest plantations, while several others have been converted to cardamom *Elettaria cadamomum* plantations. The study showed that the range of the Green-billed Coucal has retreated towards the south in the wet zone. Its distribution within this range is now mainly scattered into small areas where the understorey of the natural wet evergreen forest consists of the species's preferred habitat. All these patches add up to an area of only about 315 km² (0.7 per cent of the wet zone forest cover). According to this survey the range of the species has now decreased to almost two per cent of its former extent. The wet zone forests of Sri Lanka are under continuous threat due to increases in population and human activity. Severe deforestation has caused fragmentation of natural forest in the wet zone and as a result the Green-billed Coucal now has a very disjunct and extremely restricted range.

Therefore, it is of paramount importance to formulate and implement conservation measures to save this species from extinction.

*Kithsiri Gunawardena, Deepal Warakagoda and Upali Ekanayake,
Sri Lanka*

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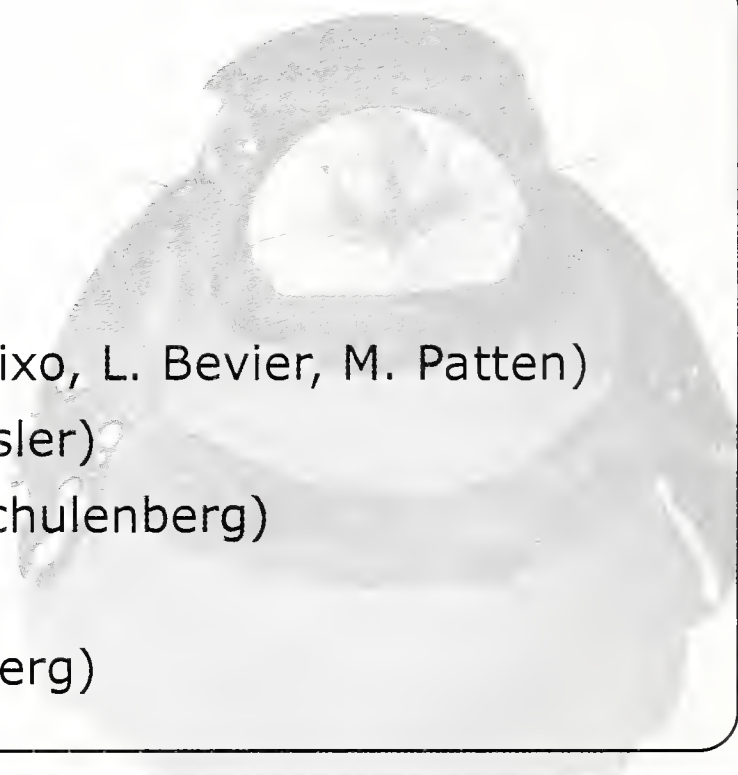
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Siberia – Asia’s great wilderness

Even today, after *glasnost* and with free access, Siberia is still surrounded by a veil of mystery and an air of the great unknown. It epitomises extremes such as vast beautiful wilderness and mosquito-infested, impenetrable swamps, as well as unbearably cold winters, nuclear waste dumps, scattered gulags, and the infamous Russian labour camps of Stalin’s era. These visions have been generated and kept alive by a lack of information and virtual inaccessibility for almost 100 years. On the other hand, Siberia is connected with extreme ornithological rarities. It is the country of many birders’ dreams, the home of rare thrushes, warblers and the dazzling Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*.

In many respects Siberia is a country of superlatives. Even if you ignore the European part of Russia, the remaining area is vast; Siberia, at

12,570,678 km², is the largest land area in the world. It also holds the record for the coldest temperatures ever recorded in the northern hemisphere (72 °C below zero in northern Yakutia). Summers can be quite hot and the temperatures recorded in a single year can range from –60 °C in the winter to +40 °C in summer, such as in Yakutsk, the capital of Yakutia in the centre of Siberia. Siberia also contains the largest forest in the world, and together with the tundra and peatbogs possibly the largest carbon sink on earth. Last, but by no means least, Siberia hosts the largest wilderness area without any physical structure outside the Antarctic, comprising 2,803,036 km². However, oil exploration, mineral mining, logging and other activities disturb this huge wilderness. Enough of the superlatives; compared to all other areas in the Oriental Region

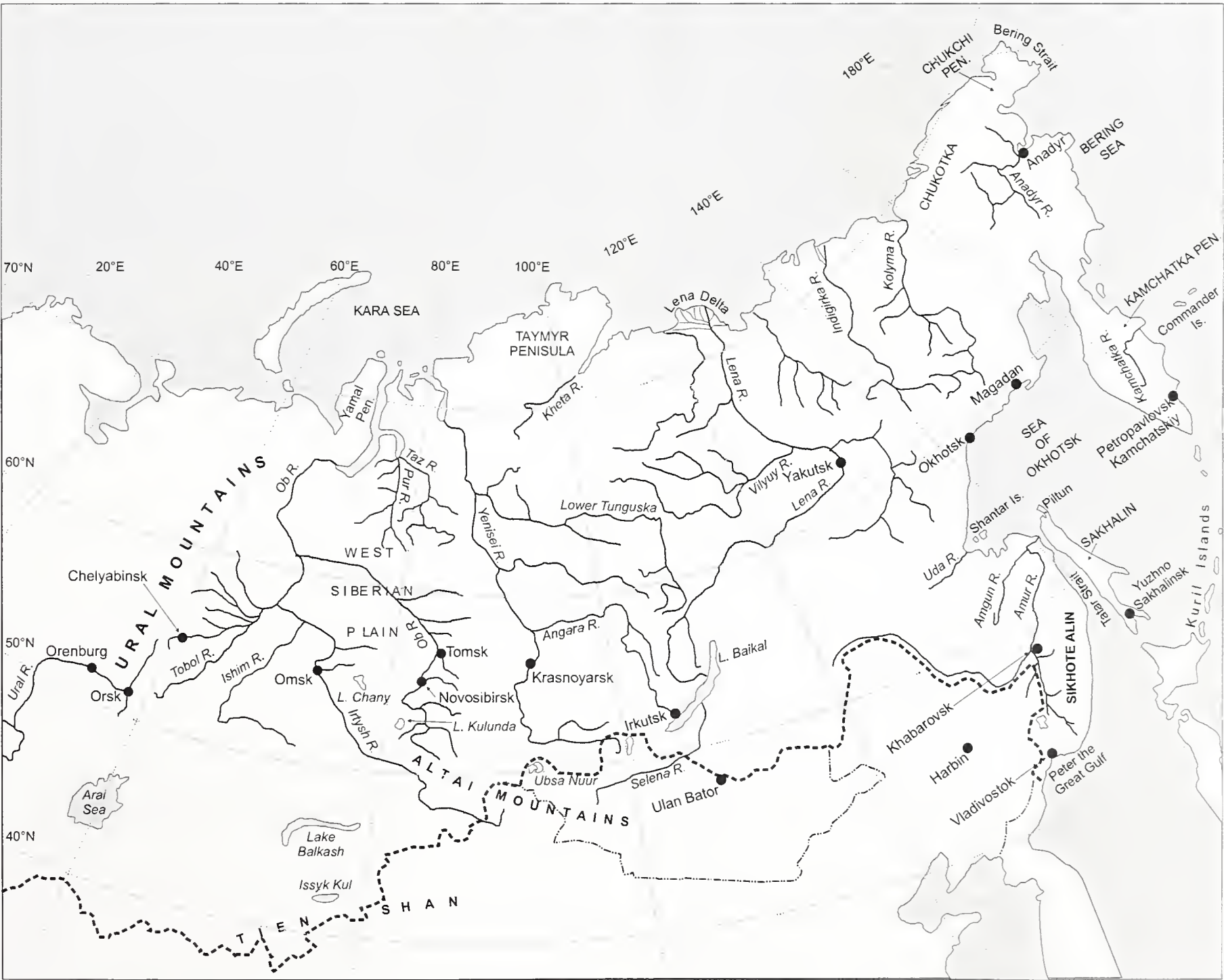


Figure 1. Map of Siberia showing major cities, towns, lakes, rivers and mountain ranges.

it is very poor in terms of the number of species it possesses but it holds many birds on the 'most wanted' lists of world birders. In Siberia, many of these birds are especially attractive as they can be seen in their breeding finery.

The Yenisey River in central Siberia is one of the largest rivers in the Oriental Region and Asia, and the seventh largest in the world. Its riverbed, stretching from the Sayan mountains in the south, northwards to Taimyr, is the most important zoogeographical boundary in the Palaearctic.¹ It divides Western and Eastern Siberia into two regions with partly different sets of species and populations choosing different flyways. In this introduction the Yenisey will also serve as the western limit for the new area included in the OBC region.

Considering the sheer size of the region, it appears to be an almost impossible task to provide a complete overview of Siberia and its bird fauna. I have been lucky enough to visit Siberia during seven summer expeditions, six of them in the Siberian Arctic, but have still only covered a small fraction of the vast area. This overview will try to give an introduction to the richness of this huge and wild country and discusses some of the characteristic avifauna and its peculiarities and differences compared with other areas in the Oriental Region.

History of ornithological research

To describe the history of the exploration of Siberian birds is itself a huge task, which would not fit into this introduction and could indeed occupy an article all of its own. A few names, however, should be mentioned, as some of them are forever connected with Siberian bird species. Among the early explorers are Gmelin, Pallas, and Gldenstdt. Later Menzbier, Radde and Buturlin joined in to explore further remote areas in Siberia. With Middendorf, Steller and others, the harsh north has been studied since the 18th century. The names of these early explorers still resound in some of today's Siberian bird names, such as Steller's Eider *Polysticta stelleri*, Pallas's Bunting *Emberiza pallasii*, Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi* and Gldenstdt's (White-winged) Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogaster*, or in subspecies like 'Taiga' Bean Goose *Anser fabalis middendorffi* among many others. More recently came explorers like Dementiev & Gladkov,² with their attempt to produce an account of the birds of the Soviet Union, the late Kistschinski, and Flint, to name just a few, explored the far north and east. A more detailed account of the history of the ornithological exploration of Siberia can be found

in Il'icev and Flint.³ Many regional accounts have been written recently, and are recommended as further reading, such as Rogacheva¹ for Central Siberia, Vorobojev⁴ for Yakutia, and Portenko for the northern part of Chukotka, each with intensive accounts of the historical research of the birds in the region, but still very incomplete in coverage. Among the more recent Arctic ornithologists, are Andreev, Kondratiev, Tomkovich, Morozov, Syroechkovski Jr., Lappo, who with many others are working on a Russian-wide scheme covering almost all Siberia. For many years they have been undertaking expeditions into the unknown parts of Siberia in search of unknown breeding populations, and to undertake research into the flyway patterns of Siberian migrants. It is due to the pioneering work and expeditions organised by E.E. Syroechkovski Jr since 1990, that knowledge about many formerly unvisited regions in the Russian Arctic has increased considerably in recent years.

Even today, huge areas of Siberia remain undiscovered and have never been visited by any ornithologists. One would not expect to find new species, as northern latitudes are naturally not very species-rich, but the distribution and breeding status of several species are still very little known. Undoubtedly, many surprises await: recent years have seen the discovery of the Solitary Snipe *Gallinago solitaria* breeding in Chukotka and the proof of American species, such as Semi-palmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla* in the 90s, while as recently as 2002, Semi-palmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus* was discovered breeding in Siberia. One reason for these discoveries is clearly the sheer size of the country and its inaccessibility with hardly any roads, railways or any kind of infrastructure. Only a few settlements or outposts on remote Arctic coasts or along the large rivers provide access, and these are limited further by insufficient supplies and inappropriate facilities. Siberia is likely to become more fragmented in the near future, but currently huge areas are virtually untouched and have seen hardly any visitors at all. Another reason for the paucity of knowledge at some sites is the short period of two or three months when birds are present to study. Last, but not least, there is a widespread ignorance of the Russian literature and of what is known amongst Russian scientists.

Severe winters and very hot summers characterise the continental climate in Siberia. Continuous permafrost over almost the entire region, together with the severe climate, determines the dominating habitats of swamps and wetlands. Tundra, taiga and forest swamps

prevail, with a bird species community highly dominated by species that migrate to escape extreme winters. Mountainous areas are comparatively rare, but in high latitudes elevations above several hundred metres have a huge impact on the vegetation and resemble mountainous habitats.

Birds

In terms of biodiversity Siberia is not very rich compared to other areas of similar size and most countries in the Oriental Region. The exact number of recorded bird species is not known, but does not exceed many more than 700. Before listing the most prestigious bird species it might be challenging to guess which species are the most abundant in the vast landscape of Siberia. Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* is a strong candidate, as are Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*, Brambling *Fringilla montifrigilla* and Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*. The latter is also colonising vast areas of bush tundra and is breeding as far north as 72°N. Little Bunting becomes scarce further south, but the Yellow Wagtail has been observed in almost all biomes and as far north as the typical tundra, even where there are only a few bushes, all under half a metre in height. These suggestions are disputable and some other likely candidates can be put forward. However, it is certainly not the Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* or Great Tit *Parus major*, which top the lists in most European regions.

Migration

Another important feature when comparing Siberia with other regions is the lack of birds in winter. Almost all the birds are migratory and stay for only for a short period. Only a few birds overwinter. These include the Rock Ptarmigan *Lagopus mutus*, Willow Grouse *L. lagopus* and Common Raven *Corvus corax*. Sometimes Snowy Owls *Nyctea scandiaca* stay for most of the winter and only move further south periodically with cold spells. All other birds are migrants, often long-distance and intercontinental, connecting virtually all other regions and habitats on the globe with their flyways. This includes the oceans in the case of the two phalarope species *Phalaropus* spp., and Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini* that migrate to the sea off the Chilean coast. Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* and Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* migrate as far as Africa and many waders travel to Australia. A large proportion of waterbirds, such as Steller's Eider, Black Brant *Branta bernicla nigricans*, Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*,

Pectoral Sandpipers *Calidris melanotos* and some passerines, winter in America. There is virtually nowhere on earth that is not connected by some flyway to a north Siberian breeding site! Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes* and Wandering Tattler *H. incanus* winter in Australia and the South Pacific islands, for example. The first migrant returning to the tundra is the Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*, often arriving as early as April, when temperatures still remain below zero for most of the day, although the majority arrive only with the snowmelt in late May and June. One of the late arrivals is Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*, which does not arrive in its northern breeding territories before mid-June, and often only by the end of the month. With most species departing from their breeding grounds not later than August/September, the large majority of the birds are present for only three to four months in Siberia.

The huge number of waterbirds and the huge boreal forest are the most characteristic features of Siberia. The northern tundra is rich in wetlands, open landscapes and large floodplains, forming the breeding grounds of tens of millions of ducks, millions of geese and several tens of millions of waders, gulls and terns. The large majority of most northern dabbling ducks, almost all geese and most waders wintering in Europe, Asia and Africa, nest in Siberia.

Globally threatened birds

Among the 37 globally threatened species breeding in Siberia, three are classified as Critical, 11 as Endangered, and 23 as Vulnerable.⁵ Indisputably the most famous of all is the Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*, whose breeding sites have not been found since 1924,⁶ and the almost extinct Crested Shelduck *Tadorna cristata* from the Russian Far East.

Of these globally threatened species nine are Siberian breeding endemics and three have major populations in this part of Russia. Among them the Critically Endangered Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus*, the Endangered Hooded Crane *Grus monacha*, the rare Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*, the magnificent Steller's Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus*, endemic to the Russian Far East, and of course the charismatic Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmeus* which only breeds along the coast of Chukotka and northern Kamchatka.

Among the red-listed ducks and geese, the Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* is endemic to the Taimyr and Gydan peninsula and the Baikal Teal *Anas formosa* to eastern Siberia. The Lesser

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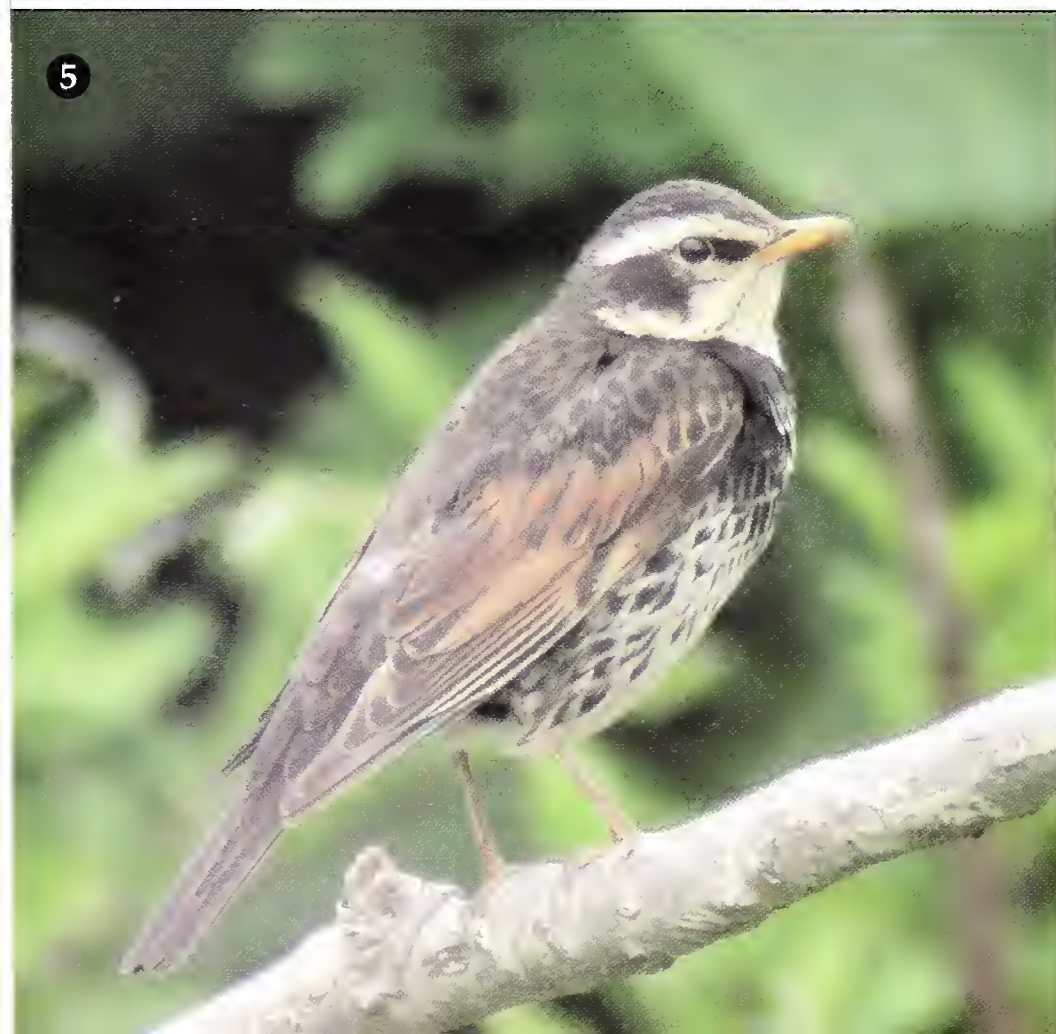
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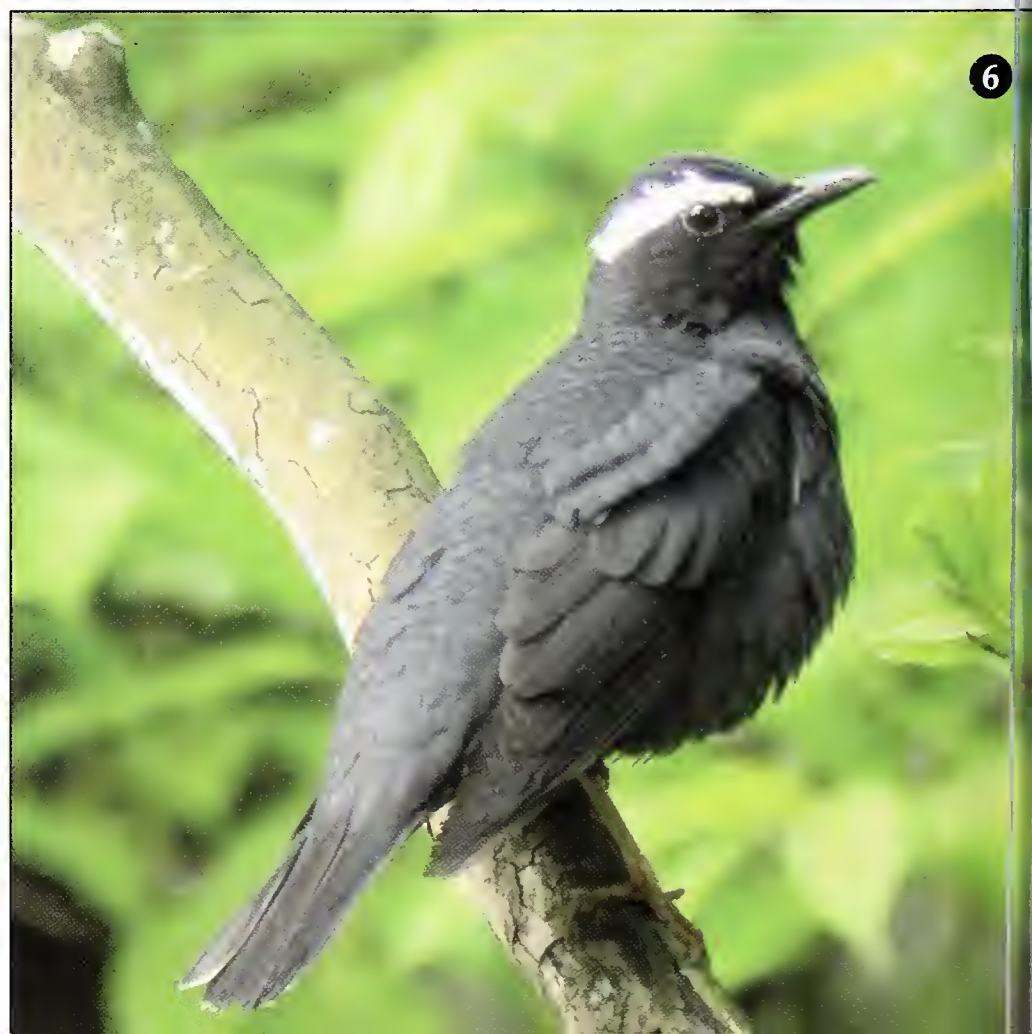
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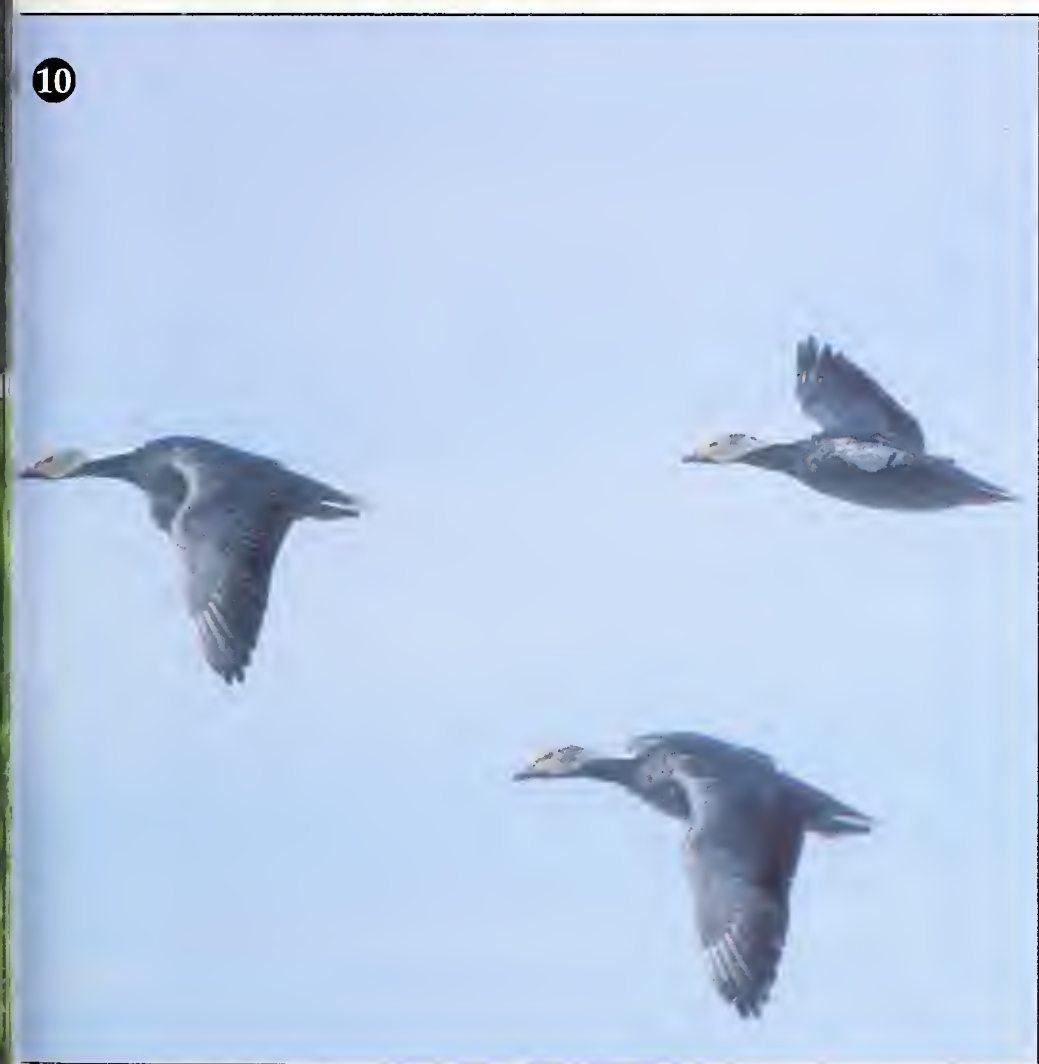


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*Production of this double colour plate
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Captions are on page 24

White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* possibly has more than 95% of its remaining population in Siberia. Steller's Eider, almost extinct in Alaska, is now a breeding endemic to Russia, nesting only in Siberia, with a stable population of more than 200,000 birds.

Endemic breeding species

There are about 24 endemic breeding birds. Strictly speaking, not all of them are truly endemic, but the large majority of their populations breed in Siberia. For example, Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea* also breeds in Canada and sometimes in Greenland, but there are only a very few pairs. The large majority breed in Russia, and

here almost exclusively in Yakutia, especially in the Yano-Indigirka basin (Zöckler & Lappo in prep.). More than 50,000 individuals of this charismatic gull breed here.

The Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, which has a large breeding range stretching from Taimyr to western Chokotka is not really an endemic either, but is only known to breed in Siberia, and not even in European Russia. In addition to Curlew Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*, Great Knot *C. tenuirostris*, Red-necked Stint *C. ruficollis*, Long-toed Stint *C. subminuta* – with a small population in northern Mongolia, and the globally threatened Spoon-billed Sandpiper, are all endemic to Siberia.

In Siberia, 20 of the total of 24 sandpiper species regularly breed, whereas in neighbouring Alaska there are only 14, and in other Arctic regions even fewer species.⁷ Other endemic waders include Grey-tailed Tattler and Little Curlew *Numenius minutus*.

Furthermore, the globally threatened Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus*, as well as the enigmatic Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi* and Naumann's Thrush *Turdus naumanni*, only breed in Siberia. The Siberian Crane population has suffered losses but still has a fairly healthy population breeding in the remote tundra of the Yano-Indigirka basin. However, the West Siberian population in the Ob river region seems to be almost extirpated.

Major biomes and selected species

It is beyond the scope of this article to introduce all the many different regions in Siberia. It remains adequate to describe the bird fauna of a few major biomes, and their characteristics.

High Arctic tundra

The high Arctic tundra, often also referred to as the 'Arctic desert', is the most northerly habitat in Siberia and Eurasia. It occurs only in the north of the Taimyr Peninsula and on the New Siberian and other islands in the Arctic Sea. Only sparse vegetation survives the long, severe winters with hardly any precipitation, as most snow is blown away, leaving the soil bare and vulnerable to frost. Only a few birds breed but some of them *only* breed here and in the higher mountains further south. These include Red Knot *Calidris canutus*, which migrates from Siberia with different migration routes to either Europe and Africa, or to South-East Asia, Australia and New Zealand, and Sanderling *C. alba*, which similarly spreads along almost all the world's sandy shores outside the breeding season. Waders clearly dominate this habitat and others include Ruddy Turnstone

Captions to plates on pages 22, 23 and 29

- 1 Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaeus*. Photo by Chris Schenk.
- 2 Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*. Photo by Ray Tipper.
- 3 Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*. Photo by Pete Morris.
- 4 Meadow Bunting *Emberiza cioides*. Photo by Pete Morris.
- 5 Dusky Thrush *Turdus naumanni*. Photo by Pete Morris.
- 6 Siberian Thrush *Zoothera sibirica*. Photo by Pete Morris.
- 7 Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini*. Photo by Christoph Zöckler.
- 8 Ross's Gull *Rhodostethia rosea*. Photo by Christoph Zöckler.
- 9 Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis*. Photo by Christoph Zöckler.
- 10 Emperor Goose *Anser canagica*. Photo by Christoph Zöckler.
- 11 Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*. Photo by Christoph Zöckler.
- 12 Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*. Photo by Christoph Zöckler.
- 13 Heuglin's Gull *Larus heuglini*. Photo by Christoph Zöckler.
- 14 Steller's Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus*. Photo by Pete Morris.
- 15 Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutulata*. Photo by Pete Morris.
- 16 Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*. Photo by Pete Morris.
- 17 Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*. Photo by Pete Morris.
- 18 Yellow-billed Loon *Gavia adamsii*. Photo by Christoph Zöckler.

Arenaria interpres and Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*. Among the passerines, only the Snow Bunting, and a bit further south in more vegetated tundra the Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus*, occur as ground-breeding birds. Along the Arctic Sea coast on the salt marshes and also on the many small islands of Taimyr, Brent Geese *Branta bernicla* are often accompanied by gulls, such as Vega *Larus [argentatus] vegae*, Heuglin's *Larus heuglini* and Glaucous Gulls *Larus hyperboreus*, often mixed with Sabine's Gulls and eiders. In Siberia all four species of eider breed in the tundra, often near the coast with gull and goose colonies, though King *Somateria spectabilis* and Steller's Eider breed far inland as well.

Typical tundra

Typical tundra is tundra with wet grassy vegetation, wide open landscapes, no trees, hardly any small bushes, many flowers in spring after the snowmelt and constantly wet soil conditions surrounded by an endless network of small puddles, ponds and lakes, providing an almost endless resource for millions of waterbirds. First of all, the dominant presence of loons (divers) should be mentioned. All five species breed in Siberia. Their weird, bone-shivering calls cut through the air at night or on misty days, as it is never really dark in June and July in the tundra. This area is also home to hundred of thousands of dabbling ducks, mostly Pintail *Anas acuta* joined by Greater White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons*, Bean Geese *Anser fabalis* and Tundra Swans *Cygnus columbianus*. The waders are the dominant bird group.

There are mostly different calidrid sandpipers with Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Pectoral Sandpiper and Little Stint *C. minutus* in the lowland tundra, Red necked Stint on the slopes and the rare Spoon-billed Sandpiper on the coastal tundra along selected gravel spits with just the right amount of vegetation.⁸ In some tundra areas, mainly in the large river deltas, waders are the most common birds and their displays dominate the scene. Sandpipers and plovers make fluting calls, Whimbrels *Numenius phaeopus* and Spotted Redshanks *Tringa erythropus* join in with their whistling calls, only interrupted by the Lapland Longspur, constantly alert and piping, worried about the intruder and accompanying every visitor at close range. The Lapland Longspur is the only songbird breeding here on the ground, sometimes joined by Red-throated Pipits *Anthus cervinus*.

Southern tundra or forest tundra

This zone stretches from Europe to the far east in Chukotka, and is a mix of both the tundra and taiga biomes. Characteristically, this zone is interspersed with bogs and swamps. Often the forest is situated on very wet ground, such as on small islands in bogs, or the other way round with bogs like lakes in the vast taiga forest further south. With more trees and bushes the waterbird-dominated avifauna is increasingly mixed with forest birds, such as Siberian Jays *Perisoreus infaustus*, Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* and Dusky Thrush *Turdus naumanni*. The forest tundra is infamous for its abundance of mosquitoes that can reach unbearable densities in early July, just when many wader species are feeding their young. Typical of the area are Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and Pintail Snipe *G. stenura*, which often occur in close proximity. Although very similar in appearance, their flight displays in spring and summer are distinctive. Two other wader species inhabit the forest tundra but more sporadically – the distribution of Little Curlew is discontinuous and still not fully understood, but breeding records have been exclusively in the forest tundra areas, in particular in the Yano-Indigirka floodplain.⁹ The other is Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*, which prefers forest bogs. Its distribution is also patchy, and unknown in many eastern regions. The typical pipit of the forest tundra is the Pechora Pipit, which again is almost always accompanied by massive mosquito swarms. Its primary habitat is small bushes, either willow or alder, not more than a metre high, often in the floodplain of large rivers or near lakes. Of the other passerines, Pallas's and Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* are quite common. The latter prefers the more coniferous-forested areas. Pallas's Bunting is spreading far into the bush tundra north of the forest zone, and is a common bird in northern Yakutia.

Taiga

The largest forest in the world, the Siberian taiga, stretches from the foothills of the Eastern Urals well into Chukotka with very little fragmentation even now, and is only interrupted by the great rivers that run north into the Arctic Ocean. It is very diverse and many birds nest here. The forest tree composition varies considerably from south to north. In the southern and middle Taiga, spruce and fir dominate, and are mixed with many deciduous forest trees, such as birch, oak and ash. Further north, larch dominates and in high latitudes the forest looks dead with many square

kilometres of needleless larch trees that only become green as late as the end of June.

The taiga is home to many different owl species, such as Great Grey *Strix nebulosa*, Eurasian Eagle *Bubo bubo*, Northern Hawk *Surnia ulula* and further south Ural *Strix uralensis*, Boreal *Aegolius funereus* and Eurasian Pygmy *Glaucidium passerinum*. It is, of course, also home to many woodpecker species. Some of them occur as far north as 70°N, such as Three-toed *Picoides tridactylus* and Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* in Yakutia, sometimes accompanied by Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* at 68°N, as observed in the middle stretches of the Indigirka. These are the same species as are known from Fennoscandia, but a few, such as Western Capercaillie *Tetrao urogallus* of the Western Palaearctic, are replaced by their Siberian counterparts, in this case Spotted Capercaillie *Tetrao parvirostris*. Most raptors, as with owls, are the same species as in Europe. The taiga is also the home of many of the most 'wanted' thrushes. In fact the two forms of Naumann's Thrush pretty much describe the taiga forest boundary, although the dark form, Dusky Thrush *Turdus naumanni eunomus* expands far into the north, colonising some bushy tundra areas. Other thrushes, such as Eyebrowed *Turdus obscurus*, Scaly *Zoothera dauma* and Siberian Thrush *Zoothera sibirica*, almost entirely breed only in Siberia. Pale Thrush *Turdus pallidus* and Dark-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis* also breed in the southern part, and the Grey-backed Thrush *Turdus hortulorum* only in the Far East. Also closely linked with taiga is the enigmatic Orange-flanked Bush Robin *Tarsiger cyanurus*, which spreads across the whole Siberian taiga forest, reaching into Finland at the limit of its western distribution. The nightingale of Siberia is the Siberian Rubythroat, which inhabits shrubby vegetation along riverbeds and taiga forest edges. In Chukotka, it extends its breeding range well beyond the taiga zone and even settles in the bushes on mountain slopes. Two more characteristic Siberian specialities are Rufous-tailed Robin *Luscinia sibilans* and Siberian Blue Robin *L. cyane*; the latter may be the most highly-prized bird by European birdwatchers, breeding exclusively in dense southern taiga forest in Siberia. Thinking of Siberian taiga, many different flycatchers come to mind. The Red-throated Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* is the most widely distributed, with two distinct races. The western nominate race also occurs in Central Europe, but here usually occurs in broad-leaved forest, whereas further east the species settles in the taiga. The eastern subspecies *F. parva albicilla* breeds east

of the Lena river and is regarded by many as a separate species with a clearly different song. Mugimaki *Ficedula mugimaki*, Dark-sided *Muscicapa sibirica*, Asian Brown *M. dauurica* and Grey-streaked Flycatcher *M. griseisticta* are characteristic eastern forest birds among many other flycatcher species that are more abundant in the Russian Far East. Siberian taiga birds would not be accurately described without mentioning the specialities among the leaf warblers. The most widespread is the Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*, the ultimate Siberian migrant. Oddly enough, every year hundreds are recorded on European coasts after migrating the wrong direction for several thousand kilometres. Of more southerly distribution is Radde's Warbler *P. schwarzi* which colonises mixed forest in the southern taiga. Further north in mixed forest with birch and willow undergrowth, the Dusky Warbler *P. fuscatus* is abundant. Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus* is typical of the old growth dark coniferous forests, but does not extend far north beyond the typical taiga. All other typical Siberian warblers are much more widely distributed and can be found regularly in riverine forests in the forest tundra zone. In Chukotka, Dusky Warbler replaces the Willow Warbler and extends far north into the tundra region colonising bushes along riverbeds and mountain slopes. Also worthy of mention is Arctic Warbler *P. borealis* that just reaches into the northern tundra but prefers the sparsely vegetated northern forest that extends well into the forest tundra zone. With the Willow Warbler and the Siberian Chiffchaff *P. [collybita] tristis* further west in willow and birches, the Arctic Warbler colonises the eastern edges of the northern taiga zone.

There is at least one more group of special Siberian birds worth mentioning here and they are the buntings. Siberia hosts more than 21 different bunting species. Many of them just range into the Russian Far East and some are steppe and forest steppe specialities, such as the Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps*. The taiga hosts Siberian specialities such as Pine Bunting *E. leucocephala*, Black-faced Bunting *E. melanocephala* and Yellow-browed Buntings *E. chrysosphrys*.

Forest steppe

The forest steppe is an extensive area of forest interspersed with bogs and open areas, with steppe grassland increasing further east. Due to its open character, the steppe and bog areas host a number of waterbirds, notably waders. It is presumably somewhere here where the last suspected breeding Slender-billed Curlews occur.

The rare Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, only breeds in Siberia and also inhabits the steppe grasslands. Among the many passerines, Meadow Bunting *Emberiza cioides* appears to be most characteristic of this habitat.

Mountains

Mountainous habitats in the north already start with an altitude of a few hundred metres due to the high latitude. Higher mountains do not contain any bird life, and are often covered with permanent ice and surrounded by bare rocks, with a few ravines here and there. Quite often Snow Buntings will accompany the visitor here. Among the waders, Great Knot prefers to colonise the rounded tops of the mountains, often in the company of Dotterel. Further north, in Taimyr and Chukotka, Red Knot breeds in the sparsely vegetated mountains. The characteristic pipit is Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens* and the typical finch is the Asian Rosy Finch *Leucosticte arctoa*, which is nowhere common but found as far north as the Lena Delta.¹⁰

This is only a brief introduction to the main habitats and certainly incomplete, with a bias to the northern part of Siberia. The southern part of the area around Lake Baikal has been described already¹¹ and the very different, almost tropical, Primorsky Krai is very special with many different birds, and should be considered separately. Many further accounts of different regions are planned, describing the variety of different bird habitats in Siberia in more detail.

Threats and conservation

Siberia has the reputation of being a vast rubbish dump among many westerners, filled with nuclear waste, connected by oil-polluted rivers and dead forests. In fact, Siberia is still one of the most untouched and pristine wilderness areas in the world, with little fragmentation and pollution today. However, there are problems. One of the major issues is oil and mineral extraction and here work is often not carried out in the most sound way as the concept of space is very different from that of densely populated Central Europe.

In combination with the mining activity there is also some serious freshwater pollution, and transport methods to remote taiga and tundra sites without roads are devastating for tundra soils, which only recover after more than a hundred years in many cases. Apart from the gradual fragmentation creeping into Siberia, pollution is currently on a minute scale compared to the vast area of the region. Although serious problems locally, they are on a different scale

compared to the systematic destruction of habitats in the western world. A serious and continuing threat to the environment is the pollution of forest rivers in southern Siberia by rocket fuel dumps, and leftover rockets shot from eastern Kazakhstan. Climate change is a serious threat to bird habitats but many species will gradually shift further north with the changing habitats. This might become a problem for some of the most-northerly species, such as high arctic breeding waders¹² or species living in sensitive habitats that will gradually grow over, leaving birds with nowhere else to go. At present it is still unclear if most terrestrial parts of Siberia are warming or cooling.¹³

As Siberia has the majority of all breeding waterbirds, the largest forest and, with the tundra and bogs, the largest carbon sink on earth, there should be no doubt about the importance of conservation. Russia, and in particular Siberia, with its many autonomous republics, has recognised this and responded by creating a large network of protected areas. Without doubt, however, these are not sufficient to face the many coming threats and awareness needs to be raised to balance the need for development with the requirements of sustainability.

Visiting Siberia

It is strongly advised to travel only in the company of Russian colleagues or with a tour company. Several companies are operating, mostly in the southern part of Siberia. It is not that Siberia is unsafe – quite the opposite – I never came across any hostility and we were never robbed, apart from our vodka supplies (and that on three occasions)! The Russians and the indigenous people are very friendly and hospitable but even if you are familiar with the language you will probably spend most of your time negotiating for petrol and transport, the options being either stuck or parting with an enormous amount of money!

Acknowledgements

Without the consistent support and company of my Russian friends through most of my visits to Siberia, it would have been impossible to visit the remote parts or write about its birds. Among all the many friends who supported us I would like to mention in particular Dr. Elena Lappo and Dr. E. E. Syroechkovski, with whom I shared so many observations and adventures. Carol and Tim Inskipp very kindly provided valuable comments. Thanks to all of them.

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Captions to plate on opposite page are on page 24.



Stellar's Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus* by Nik Borrow (courtesy of Birdquest).





Little-known Oriental Bird

Heinrich's Nightjar *Eurostopodus diabolicus*

Walking down from the dismantled Anaso logging camp on the western slopes of Mount Rorekatimbu towards the Palu-Napu main road bisecting the Lore Lindu National Park in Central Sulawesi around dusk on 18 July 1998, I was truly startled by an unidentified flying object nearly colliding with me. Probably as shocked as I was, it hovered for a few seconds at breast height less than half a metre in front of me whilst repeatedly uttering a distinctive *tchor*, and subsequently perched nearby at eye-height on top of low roadside ginger thickets, soon revealing itself as a medium-sized nightjar species. Fortunately this bird remained happily in the torch beam for about five minutes as I gradually approached it down to point-blank range, and I had little hesitation in identifying it as a female Heinrich's Nightjar *Eurostopodus diabolicus*, one of Sulawesi's most enigmatic and sought-after endemic bird species. On 23 July I revisited the site, which is situated at about 1,900 m elevation, accompanied by Bernard and Erika van Eleghem-Winne, who had received a sound recording of *E. diabolicus* secured by Mark van Beirs also at Anaso during a Birdquest tour the previous year, *de facto* perhaps the first definite contemporary record of the species (see below). Most likely the territorial male belonging to the previously spotted female, responded dramatically for a short period around dusk by flying several times low overhead and calling back regularly. Between 15 and 18 December 1998 together with Raf Drijvers I taped out a pair on three occasions around the former Anaso clearing at about 2,000 m elevation and further located two different pairs along the main road at an altitude of about 1,750 m near Lake Tambing.^{1,2} With the exception of the Anaso pair, which perched briefly though rather distantly, the birds were mostly seen in flight, however, their vocalisations were still clearly tape-recorded. On 13 July 2000 I heard and briefly saw what was undoubtedly Heinrich's Nightjar in ridgetop lower montane forest at 1,650 m within the Gunung Ambang Nature Reserve, Bolaang Mongondow, North Sulawesi.

Great Eared Nightjar *E. macrotis* constitutes the prime confusion species and numerous unsubstantiated claims of Heinrich's Nightjar persist, originating from the fact that few observers seem to realise that the subspecies *macropterus* endemic to Sulawesi is strikingly

different from the huge harrier-like *E. m. cerviniceps* of mainland South-East Asia that they are usually already acquainted with. It definitely remains odd that many observers claiming *diabolicus* actually do not see Great Eared Nightjar at all on Sulawesi despite the latter's generally much greater relative abundance. Coates and Bishop³ briefly summarised the main distinguishing features of Heinrich's Nightjar and the species's identification has been thoroughly elucidated by Cleere and Nurney.⁴ In contrast, Bishop and Diamond⁵ incomprehensibly perpetuate some of the previous misconceptions by talking about a much larger *E. m. macrotis* with harrier-like flight when discussing differences with *diabolicus*.

Only the unique female type specimen of Heinrich's Nightjar exists and there are slight discrepancies in available published measurements. Based on those provided by Cleere and Nurney⁴ and under the assumption that sexual biometric differentiation within *diabolicus* is marginal, as in the closely allied Archbold's Nightjar *Eurostopodus archboldi* of montane New Guinea (see below), estimated size disparity between the two forms could be up to about 20% in total body length, 26% in wing length and about 20% in tail length. Naturally, some caution is appropriate given that only the holotype is available for analysis and in other members of *Eurostopodus* the male is known to be the larger sex, in which case the discrepancies may be even further reduced slightly. Nonetheless figures above are consistent with my personal field experience of both taxa, and although substantial, to the inexperienced observer such differences may not always be easy to assess correctly in the field, especially in the dim light conditions that characterise many nightjar sightings. Sulawesi Nightjar *Caprimulgus celebensis* and Savannah Nightjar *C. affinis* share with *diabolicus* a similar biometry, making flight identification without additional supporting evidence problematical.⁴ It should be fairly straightforward that *C. celebensis*'s imperfectly known, allegedly fragmentary distribution on Sulawesi is likely to reflect inadequate coverage rather than genuine ecological and distributional processes, and whilst it may be argued that *C. affinis*, due to its different habitat requirements, does not normally coexist

with *diabolicus*, both these species at all times require earnest consideration during identification.

On Sulawesi, Great Eared Nightjar appears more attenuated, slimmer and obviously longer- and stiffer-winged, with a more pointed hand resulting in a leisurely, buoyant and purposeful flight mode with frequent long and steady glides and only occasional fluttering when actually feeding. It is a typically aerial feeder, usually hunting above the forest canopy and sometimes congregating in loose flocks of up to about 10 birds when actively feeding. However, on several occasions I have also observed this species feeding singly or in pairs very low above the ground in a manner highly reminiscent of *diabolicus*. Heinrich's Nightjar is a rather compact, short-tailed, short- and noticeably blunt-winged species, with rapid, fluttering wing-beats and an erratic flight only interspersed by short sweeping glides, that forages singly or in pairs and nearly always keeps very low to the ground. In fact, I have personally never observed *diabolicus* flying higher than mid-canopy (*contra* Bishop and Diamond⁵). As noted for Archbold's Nightjar⁴ (and pers. obs.), this species also catches prey by repeatedly sallying from exposed branches situated low above the ground in small clearings or from atop roadside thickets (pers. obs.).

In summary, Heinrich's Nightjar plumage-wise is best identified on the combination of (1) its overall dark blackish-brown dress featuring (2) a relatively rounded head lacking erectile ear tufts, (3) an obvious greyish-brown supercilium running from the forehead to the nape, (4) a narrow buffish band across the lower throat gradually broadening and darkening towards cheeks before petering out on the side of the hindneck, (5) its blackish-brown breast extensively spotted buffish-chestnut, (6) the very dark, almost blackish arrow-shape-centred wing-coverts prominently edged rufous in fresh plumage, becoming paler buffish with wear, (7) the complete absence of a rufous hindneck collar,

and (8) its uniformly blackish-brown outer primaries with variable spotting on P2-5 (see below).^{3,4}

One apparently previously overlooked, though diagnostic feature, readily allowing identification under very poor conditions is that the eyes of Heinrich's Nightjar consistently glow purplish in the spotlight (pers. obs.; R. Drijvers pers. comm.; M. Van Beirs pers. comm.; *contra* Bishop and Diamond⁵) while those of Great Eared Nightjar, at least on Sulawesi, reflect yellowish and Sulawesi Nightjar's shine bright red. I feel this is a very reliable feature and for that reason suggest that Bishop and Diamond's rediscovery of Heinrich's Nightjar⁵ be treated with some caution, a conclusion reinforced by the facts that the described behaviour of the birds does not fit with my knowledge of the species and the plumage details are rather imprecise and ambiguous.

R. Drijvers and I originally noticed that one member of the territorial pair observed repeatedly, though briefly, in December 1998 (see above), displayed relatively extensive whitish markings in the outer wings. Images recently made available equally strongly suggest that *E. diabolicus* is sexually dimorphic, sexes varying at least in the amount of white in the outer primaries and coloration and patterning of the lower scapulars. Presumed males exhibit whitish elongated spots on P2-5 (numbered ascendantly) and relatively plain, mainly greyish, indistinctly patterned lower scapulars forming a pale panel, whilst females have the whitish in the wing restricted to exceedingly small spots on P3-4 and buffish lower scapulars boldly vermiculated with dark brown. Additional work is necessary to gain further insight into this taxonomically significant issue.

The male advertising call is highly distinctive and may best be transcribed as a loud, somewhat bubbling series of up to 36 *kweik* notes, more or less delivered at constant pitch and speed and lasting about 4.7 seconds (see Figure 1). Contact

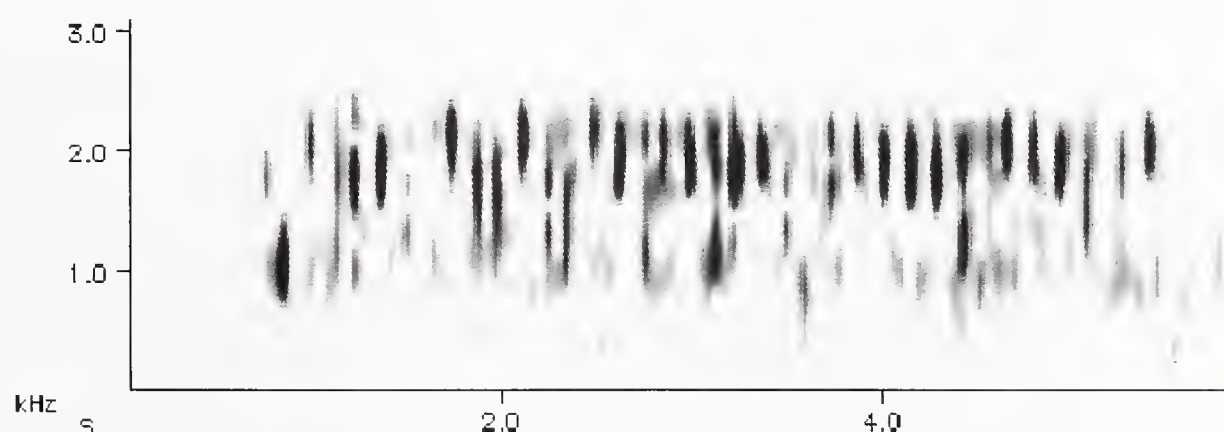
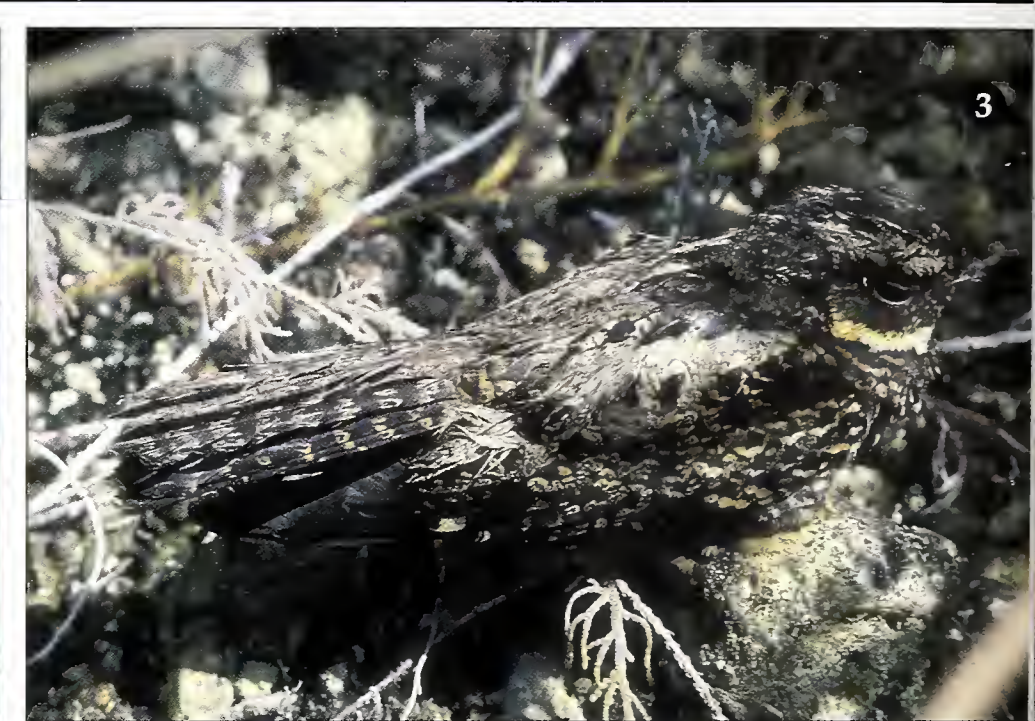
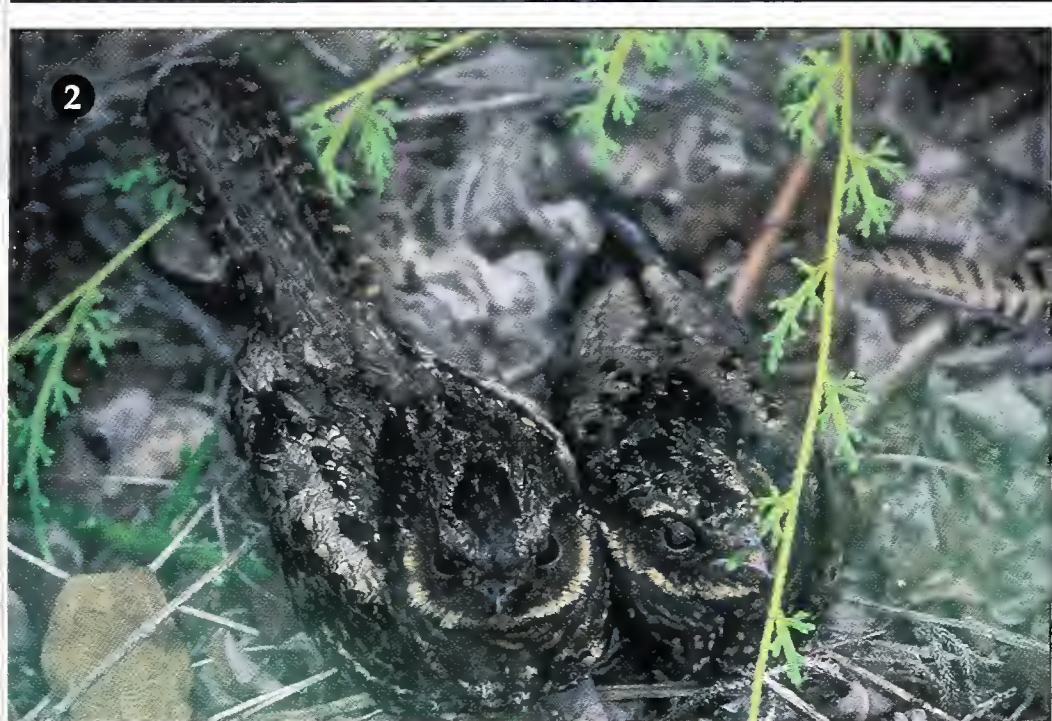


Figure 1. Advertising call of Heinrich's Nightjar *Eurostopodus diabolicus*, Anaso (2,000 m), Gunung Rorekatimbu, Lore Lindu NP, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, December 1998 (I. Mauro).



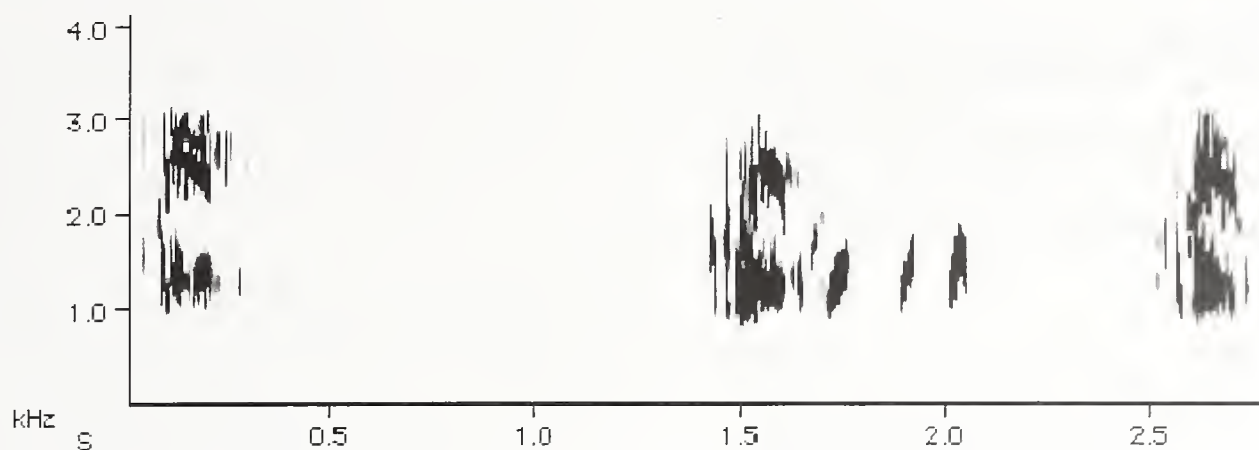


Figure 2. Contact calls of Heinrich's Nightjar *Eurostopodus diabolicus*, Anaso (2,000 m), Mount Rorekatimbu, Lore Lindu NP, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, December 1998 (I. Mauro).

calls include a soft, mellow *wheet*, often quickly repeated up to three times, and distinctive, rolling *kreep* notes uttered at variable pitch (see Figure 2). Calls are given very infrequently and perhaps mainly around dusk. Around this time the species may respond dramatically to tape playback by repeatedly calling back and by flying back and forth, often passing overhead at very close range. However, at other times of night birds proved surprisingly lethargic and no reaction was noted at all. All evidence suggests that the species calls exclusively in flight. When agitated, as the bird that nearly flew into me was, a guttural, churring *tchor* is uttered repeatedly. I stress here that none of these vocalisations is consistent with those previously tentatively ascribed to the species.^{2,5,6} Sonagrams were produced using Canary 1.2.1 at a sample frequency of 22,254.5 Hz and a resolution of 8 bits.

Clearly the affinities of Heinrich's Nightjar lie with the Australopapuan members of *Eurostopodus* and definitely not with the truly eared, Oriental species – which should perhaps be retained in a separate genus *Lyncornis*⁴ – and the absence of *Eurostopodus* from the Moluccas and Lesser Sunda islands chain remains puzzling in this respect. Pending further study into the intrageneric limits of *Eurostopodus*, I therefore recommend continued use of the vernacular name Heinrich's Nightjar^{3,4} over Sulawesi Eared Nightjar². The presence of white spots on the outer primaries in both sexes of *diabolicus* constitutes a highly significant feature, suggesting it groups

with the Spotted *E. argus* and White-throated Nightjar *E. mystacalis*. However, these species exhibit many morphological characteristics that are not attributable to Heinrich's Nightjar, produce highly divergent vocalisations and have different ecological requirements, comprising essentially non-forest species.⁴ During opportunistic bird surveys in the Arfak mountains, Vogelkop peninsula, Papua (formerly Irian Jaya) province, Indonesia, I learned that the local population of the closely related Archbold's Nightjar *E. archboldi* there – only discovered as recently as 1995⁷ more than 600 km away from its nearest known breeding grounds in the Snow mountains, Papua province, Indonesia – produces exceedingly similar advertising calls to those of *diabolicus*. I failed to sound-record *archboldi* in the Arfaks though readily lured and caught two different individuals in a mist net with a recording I had made of *diabolicus*. Given this vocal analogy and many similarities in external morphology including sexual dimorphism, it might perhaps be argued that Archbold's Nightjar is the closest living congener of *diabolicus*. Archbold's Nightjar too remains a noticeably poorly known taxon: the westernmost boundary of its distribution along New Guinea's central cordillera is imperfectly known and in its historic range its vocalisations remain to be adequately described and documented⁴ (also B. Beehler *in litt.*, 24 January 2002).

That Heinrich's Nightjar – until recently known only from foothills at approximately 250 m elevation at the base of Mount Klabat in the Minahassa peninsula of North Sulawesi – should now suddenly be regularly encountered in montane forest up to at least 2,000 m (pers. obs.) more than 750 km away from the type locality, strongly suggests that the species ranges widely across forested Sulawesi and occupies a broad altitudinal zonation. Taking its retiring, crepuscular and nocturnal habits and generally silent nature into account *E. diabolicus* is probably

Captions to plate on opposite page

- 1–3 Heinrich's Nightjar *Eurostopodus diabolicus*, Anaso logging trail, Lore Lindu National Park, Sulawesi, Indonesia. Photos by Jon Hornbuckle.
- 4 Heinrich's Nightjar *Eurostopodus diabolicus*, Anaso logging trail, Lore Lindu National Park, Sulawesi, Indonesia, 13 June 2002. Photo by Jimmy Chew.

greatly overlooked rather than rare and is quite possibly at least locally reasonably common. Furthermore, as it appears to be partly tolerant of habitat degradation, its IUON category of Vulnerable^{2,8} may perhaps be altered to Near-threatened.

Acknowledgements

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The Yellow Sea and its shorebirds

Introduction

The East Asian-Australasian Flyway, one of eight shorebird flyways around the world, stretches from Siberia and Alaska, southwards through east and South-East Asia, to Australia and New Zealand, and supports over 7 million shorebirds of which some 5 million are migratory.

Much has been learnt about the breeding and non-breeding portions of shorebirds' lives within the flyway. However, relatively little is known of the migration strategies of the individual species – a deficiency which is particularly serious given that the key wetlands used during migration in east and South-East Asia are the most threatened in the flyway.

The need for greatly improved information on important shorebird staging sites has led to extensive survey and counting activity during the last 10 years, particularly along the coastline of the Yellow Sea. Since 1996, Wetlands International, has been active around the Yellow Sea coastline of China covering about 60% of the best intertidal areas to date, all during northward migration. In South Korea, staff of the Avian Laboratory, Ministry of Environment, have been conducting intensive counts of important Yellow Sea sites on both northward and southward migration since 1993, with good coverage of all important areas. Non-government organisations in South Korea have also made a major contribution in recent years. Virtually no data are available for North Korea.

The information collected has significantly improved our understanding of shorebird abundance and distribution in the Yellow Sea and of how the different species use the region. The results to date show clearly that the coastal regions of the Yellow Sea provide key migration staging sites for many shorebird species and also support important concentrations of some species during the non-breeding season. Some species also breed in significant numbers.

A detailed analysis of shorebird abundance and distribution in the Yellow Sea, together with a description of habitat threats and the current conservation situation, is given in *Shorebirds of the Yellow Sea: importance, threats and conservation status*.¹ Those requiring information on survey coverage, count methods and accuracy, and criteria for identifying internationally important concentrations, are referred to this document, which also contains a full list of citations.

The Yellow Sea and intertidal shorebird habitat

The Yellow Sea is a semi-enclosed shallow sea, with extensive intertidal areas, located between the Korean Peninsula in the east and China to the north and west (Figure 1). The southern boundary of the sea is a line drawn from the northern side of the Chang Jiang (Yangtze River) estuary eastwards to the island of Cheju and then northwards to the south-west coast of South Korea. The average depth is 46 m, but is only 26 m in the Bohai.

For the purposes of this paper, shorebird data from the Chang Jiang estuary and its islands, and from the south coast of South Korea, have also been included in the analysis.

The Chinese coast consists of extensive stretches of tidal flats separated by the rocky sections of the Shandong and Liaoning Peninsulas and north-west Liaodong Wan. Deltas occur at the mouths of the Chang Jiang, Huang He (Yellow River), Luan He and Liao He. The west coast of South Korea consists of extensive tidal flats, which are contained in broad estuaries in the north and surround islands in the south-west. The south coast has deep bays with large mudflats.

The total area of intertidal flats in the Yellow Sea, including the Chang Jiang estuary and the

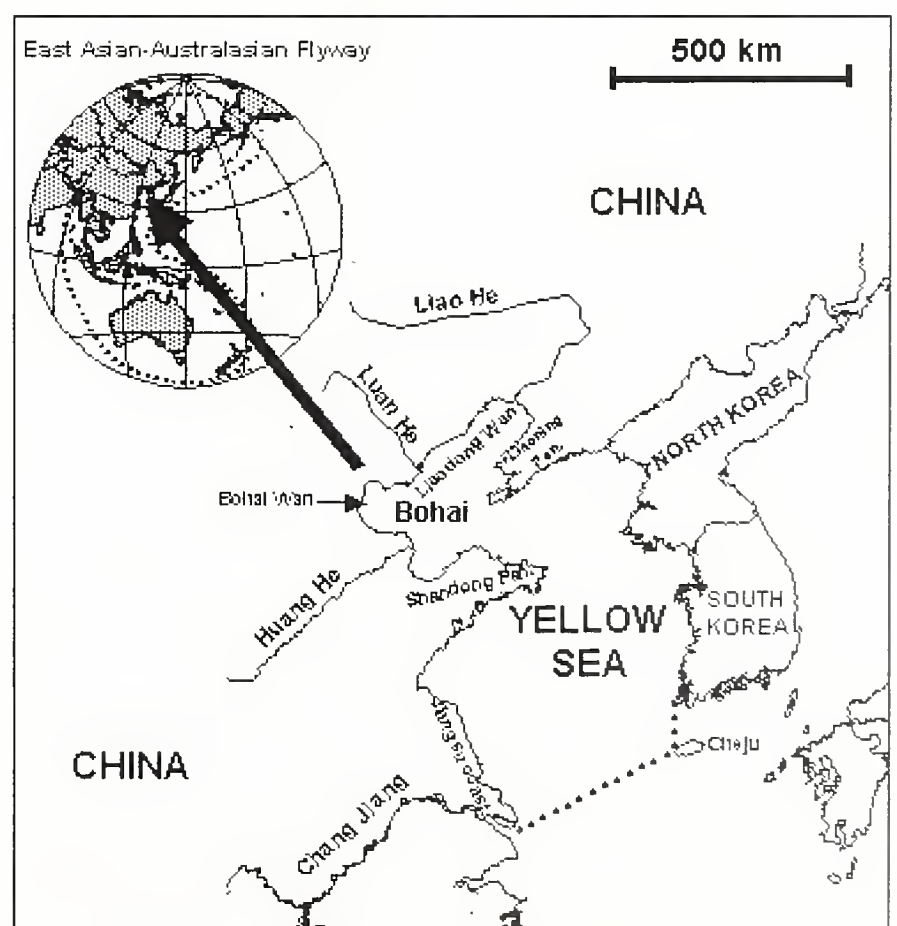


Figure 1. The Yellow Sea: location, national boundaries, constituent parts and major rivers.

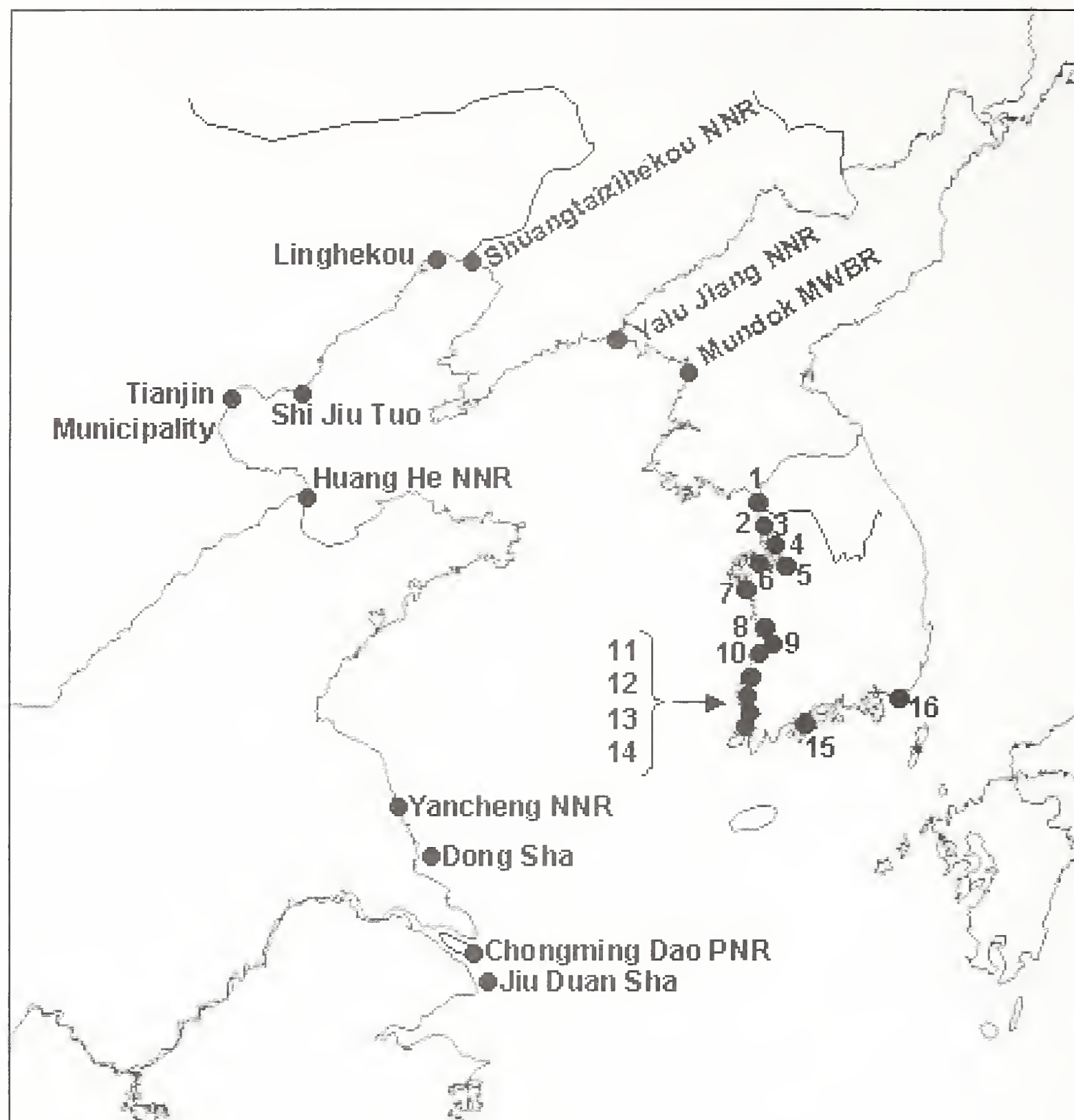


Figure 2. Locations of the sites in the Yellow Sea at which internationally important numbers of at least one species of shorebird have been recorded. Key for South Korean sites: 1 Ganghwa Do, 2 Yong Jeong Do, 3 Daebu Do, 4 Namyang Man, 5 Hongwon Ri, 6 Asan Man, 7 Seosan Reclaimed Area, 8 Geum Gang Hagu, 9 Mangyeong Gang Hagu, 10 Dongjin Gang Hagu, 11 Paeksu Tidal Flat, 12 Hampyeong Man, 13 Meian Gun Tidal Flat, 14 Aphae Do, 15 Suncheon Man, 16 Nakdong Gang Hagu. Note that sites 9 and 10 here correspond to Saemangeum as described on p.47.

south coast of South Korea, is about 20,000 km². The tidal ranges of the central west coast of the Korean Peninsula are amongst the highest in the world.

Main findings

It is estimated that a minimum of 2,000,000 shorebirds use the Yellow Sea wetlands during northward migration, i.e. approximately 40% of the estimated flyway population of migratory shorebirds. Perhaps 1,000,000 shorebirds pass through the region on southward migration, when many birds use different routes.

A total of 36 shorebird species has so far been found to occur in internationally important

numbers at one or more sites. These represent 60% of the migratory shorebird species in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

A total of 27 sites has been identified around the Yellow Sea coastline at which at least one shorebird species has been recorded in internationally important numbers. Ten of these sites are located in China, one in North Korea and sixteen in South Korea.

It is very likely that more complete and thorough surveying, spatial and temporal, would result in a significant increase in the estimated abundance of many species and in the identification of additional internationally important sites.

Table 1. Species ranked according to the number of sites at which they occur in internationally important numbers, with details on seasonality

Species	Total	Number of sites of international importance			
		Northward migration	Southward migration	Non-breeding season	Breeding season
Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	21	11	16	4	2
Eurasian Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i>	15	7	11	6	-
Terek Sandpiper <i>Xenus cinereus</i>	14	9	13	-	-
Eastern Curlew <i>Numenius madagascariensis</i>	13	12	7	-	-
Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	13	12	7	-	-
Great Knot <i>Calidris tenuirostris</i>	12	11	3	-	-
Black-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa limosa</i>	12	7	6	-	-
Dunlin <i>Calidris alpina</i>	11	10	5	-	-
Lesser Sand Plover <i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	11	10	7	-	-
Common Greenshank <i>Tringa nebularia</i>	11	4	8	1	-
Whimbrel <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	9	9	-	-	-
Nordmann's Greenshank <i>Tringa guttifer</i>	9	4	6	-	-
Bar-tailed Godwit <i>Limosa lapponica</i>	8	8	1	-	-
Eurasian Oystercatcher <i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	7	3	4	2	2
Red-necked Stint <i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	5	5	2	-	-
Black-winged Stilt <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	5	4	3	-	2
Marsh Sandpiper <i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	5	3	4	-	-
Red Knot <i>Calidris canutus</i>	5	3	2	-	-
Broad-billed Sandpiper <i>Limicola falcinellus</i>	5	2	4	-	-
Asian Dowitcher <i>Limnodromus semipalmatus</i>	4	4	3	-	-
Spotted Redshank <i>Tringa erythropus</i>	4	4	2	1	-
Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius</i>	4	4	2	-	-
Ruddy Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i>	3	3	1	-	-
Sanderling <i>Calidris alba</i>	3	1	3	1	-
Common Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>	2	2	1	-	2
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper <i>Calidris acuminata</i>	2	2	1	-	-
Curlew Sandpiper <i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	2	2	-	-	-
Northern Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	2	1	2	-	-
Grey-tailed Tattler <i>Heteroscelus brevipes</i>	2	1	1	-	-
Pied Avocet <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	2	1	-	1	-
Spoon-billed Sandpiper <i>Calidris pygmeus</i>	2	-	2	-	-
Grey-headed Lapwing <i>Vanellus cinereus</i>	2	-	2	-	-
Little Curlew <i>Numenius minutus</i>	1	1	-	-	-
Oriental Plover <i>Charadrius veredus</i>	1	1	-	-	-
Red-necked Phalarope <i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	1	-	1	-	-
Oriental Pratincole <i>Glareola maldivarum</i>	1	-	-	-	1

Shorebird usage of the Yellow Sea

Table 1 lists the 36 shorebird species recorded in internationally important numbers at sites in the Yellow Sea. It also gives details on the number of sites at which they occur in significant numbers during the migration and non-breeding periods, and the breeding season. The locations of the internationally important sites are shown in Figure 2.

Thirty-five species (i.e. all except the Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*) use the Yellow Sea wetlands in internationally important concentrations during the migration periods, with 20 of these occurring at more sites during northward migration than on southward passage – however this could be an artefact caused by the relative lack of information from China during southward migration. Despite this potential bias,

some species have been found to occur at more sites during southward migration than northward. Significant proportions of some species, such as Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*, Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* and Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, appear to bypass the region during southward migration and fly across the Pacific directly to their non-breeding grounds, but it is possible that high numbers of these species may yet be found at Yellow Sea sites not yet surveyed during southward passage.

Seven species occur in internationally important concentrations in the southern part of the Yellow Sea during the non-breeding season. The great majority of the estimated flyway population of the Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* appears to spend the non-

1



2





- 1 Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*, Mai Po, Hong Kong, 9 Oct 1994. Photo by Ray Tipper.
- 2 Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*, Mai Po, Hong Kong, 9 Oct 1994. Photo by Ray Tipper.
- 3 Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*, Mai Po, Hong Kong, 27 Mar 1994. Photo by Ray Tipper.
- 4 Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*. Photo by Norio Kawano.

breeding season in the Yellow Sea, and more than 50% of the population occurs at one site on the west coast of South Korea (Geum Gang Hagu).

Five species breed at Yellow Sea sites in internationally important numbers.

Sites at which species counts have exceeded 5%, 10% or 20% of their estimated flyway population during northward migration, southward migration or the non-breeding season are listed in Table 2. It can be seen that many species occur in site concentrations that greatly exceed the 1% threshold used for determining international importance. These sites are of prime conservation significance.

A summary of the estimated numbers using the Chinese and South Korean portions of the Yellow Sea during northward migration is given in Table 3 for those species for which sufficient count data are available. An estimate is also given of the proportion of the flyway breeding populations being supported at this time of the year.

The very great importance of the Yellow Sea for shorebirds during northward migration is demonstrated by the fact that it supports 30% or

Table 2. Species occurring in concentrations >20%, >10% and >5% of their estimated flyway population and the sites at which they occur on a seasonal basis

Species	>20%	>10%	>5%
Black-tailed Godwit		Asan Man (NM)	Mangyeung Gang Hagu (SM)
Bar-tailed Godwit		Yalu Jiang NNR (NM)	
Little Curlew		Huang He NNR (NM)	
Eurasian Curlew	Huang He (NM) Shi Jiu Tuo (SM)		Tianjin Municipality (NM, SM & NB) Shi Jiu Tuo (NM) Namyang Man (NM & SM) Geum Gang Hagu (SM) Yalu Jiang NNR (NM) Ganghwa Do (NM)
Eastern Curlew			Yancheng NNR (NM)
Spotted Redshank		Yancheng NNR (SM)	Yancheng NNR (NM)
Marsh Sandpiper		Yancheng NNR (NM)	Yancheng NNR (SM)
Nordmann's Greenshank			Namyang Man (NM) Mangyeung Gang Hagu (SM) Dongjin Gang Hagu (SM)
Asian Dowitcher			Dong Sha (SM)
Great Knot		Dongjin Gang Hagu (NM) Mangyeung Gang Hagu (NM) Yalu Jiang NNR (NM)	Asan Man (NM) Shuangtaizihekou NNR (NM) Namyang Man (NM)
Red Knot			Tianjin Municipality (NM)
Sanderling		Yancheng NNR (NM)	Yancheng NNR (NB)
Dunlin			Yancheng NNR (NM) Mangyeung Gang Hagu (NM)
Curlew Sandpiper			Tianjin Municipality (NM)
Eurasian Oystercatcher	Geum Gang Hagu (NB)	Geum Gang Hagu (SM)	
Black-winged Stilt		Tianjin Municipality (NM)	Shi Jiu Tuo (SM)
Grey-headed Lapwing			Shi Jiu Tuo (SM)
Northern Lapwing			Shi Jiu Tuo (SM)
Grey Plover		Huang He NNR (NM)	Yalu Jiang NNR (NM)
			Tianjin Municipality (NM)
Kentish Plover	Huang He NNR (NM)	Mangyeung Gang Hagu (SM)	Chongming Dao (NM) Dongjin Gang Hagu (SM) Shi Jiu Tuo (SM)
			Yancheng NNR (SM)
Little Ringed Plover		Yancheng NNR (SM)	
Lesser Sand Plover			Dongjin Gang Hagu (NM & SM) Mangyeung Gang Hagu (NM & SM)

(Key: For site location see Figure 2. NM = northward migration, SM = southward migration, NB = non-breeding season)

more of the flyway breeding populations of 18 species; for six of these species the region supports almost their whole flyway breeding population.

The Yellow Sea is particularly important for four species of special concern, i.e. the Endangered Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* and Vulnerable Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmeus*, and the Near-threatened Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis* and Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, which are all endemic to the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

It is highly likely that the great majority of Nordmann's Greenshank and Spoon-billed Sandpiper use the Yellow Sea during both northward and southward migrations. Both these species are difficult to separate from their congeners and many birds are probably missed.

Nonetheless, eight internationally important sites have been identified for Nordmann's Greenshank and two for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

Approximately 80% of the estimated flyway population of the Eastern Curlew use the Yellow Sea on northward migration and 40% of the Asian Dowitcher. These percentages rise to >90% and 50%, respectively, when only the breeding portions of the flyway populations are considered.

'Missing' species

Only small numbers have been recorded of a number of species that could be expected to occur in significant concentrations in the Yellow Sea. Examples of such 'missing' species are Ruddy Turnstone *Arennaria interpres*, Red Knot *Calidris canutus*, Sanderling *C. alba*, Red-necked Stint *C. ruficollis*, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *C. acuminata*,

Table 3. Estimated numbers and proportions of the breeding populations supported by the Yellow Sea during northward migration

Species	Estimated number	% breeding pop.
Great Knot	290 000	>90
Bar-tailed Godwit	230 000	>90
Grey Plover	110 000	>90
Kentish Plover	90 000	>90
Eastern Curlew	32 000	>90
Eurasian Curlew	32 000	>90
Dunlin	660 000	70
Whimbrel	33 000	70
Lesser Sand Plover	32 000	65
Spotted Redshank	20 000	60
Asian Dowitcher	9 300	50
Red Knot	67 000	40
Marsh Sandpiper	39 000	40
Red-necked Stint	87 000	35
Common Greenshank	15 000	35
Terek Sandpiper	14 000	35
Broad-billed Sandpiper	5 100	35
Black-tailed Godwit	48 000	30
Ruddy Turnstone	4 500	20
Little Curlew	>>17 000	>>10
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	17 000	10
Curlew Sandpiper	18 000	<10

(Key: >> much greater than; < less than)

Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea* and Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*. It is possible that some of these species occur in large numbers in parts of the Yellow Sea that have not yet been surveyed in China and North Korea. However, the evidence to date indicates that many Red-necked Stint, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Curlew Sandpiper are using inland routes through China. The Red Knot is an obligate coastal species which traditionally uses a very small number of staging sites during migration and it is probable that it is occurring in high numbers in some of the intertidal areas yet to be visited.

There are other species that almost certainly occur around the Yellow Sea in significant concentrations, e.g. Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura*, Swinhoe’s Snipe *G. megala*, Common Snipe *G. gallinago*, Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*, Wood Sandpiper *T. glareola*, Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, Temminck’s Stint *Calidris temminckii* and Long-toed Stint *C. subminuta*. It is likely that intensive surveying of suitable habitat would lead to some of these species being recorded in internationally important numbers.

Internationally important sites

The 27 internationally important sites (see Figure 2 for locations) exhibit a great diversity in the number of internationally important species and shorebirds they support. Summary information

on the numbers of internationally important species and highest seasonal counts at each site is presented in Table 4.

Half of the sites carry at least five internationally important species, whilst six sites (Yancheng National Nature Reserve [NNR], Tianjin Municipality, Huang He NNR, Mangyeung Gang Hagu, Shi Jiu Tuo and Dongjin Gang Hagu) support 15 or more. Five sites (Yalu Jiang NNR, Huang He NNR, Dongjin Gang Hagu, Mangyeung Gang Hagu and Yancheng NNR) have highest counts of greater than 100,000 shorebirds on northward migration, whilst one (Dong Sha) supports almost 250,000 shorebirds on southward migration.

Six extremely important regions within the Yellow Sea have been identified so far:

- central and northern Jiangsu coast;
- Bohai Wan;
- northern Liaodong Wan;
- Yalu Jiang NNR;
- Namyang Man and Asan Man; and
- the Mangyeung and Dongjin estuaries (Saemangeum).

Threats to shorebirds

The Yellow Sea coastal provinces support 20% of the 1,400 million Chinese population and 53% of the 46 million South Korean population. The rapid growth of the populations and economies of both countries is causing serious environmental problems through loss and degradation of coastal habitats.

A few facts and figures.....

- approximately 40% of the Yellow Sea intertidal areas have been reclaimed so far, and plans are in hand to reclaim 43% of what remains;
- the Huang He and Chang Jiang, the most important rivers flowing into the Yellow Sea, are undergoing significant changes that will greatly reduce the amount of sediment transport, causing an accelerating rate of loss of intertidal areas due to the combined effects of reclamation and reduced accretion;
- the Yellow Sea is heavily polluted and seawater quality is steadily deteriorating – the incidence of algal red tides around the Yellow Sea is increasing with 33 being recorded in 1998; and
- greatly increased human population numbers have led to unsustainable harvesting of shellfish (the most important food source for shorebirds) and serious disturbance of shorebirds on the feeding and roosting areas.

Table 4. Sites ranked according to the number of internationally important shorebird species supported and their highest seasonal counts

Site	Number of internationally important species	Highest count		
		North-ward migration	South-ward migration	Non-breeding season
Yancheng NNR	23	111 285	82 530	27 181
Huang He NNR	17	130 122	70 748	-
Tianjin Municipality	17	73 553	-	-
Dongjin Gang Hagu	16	126 145	36 181	-
Mangyeung Gang Hagu	16	115 054	53 178	-
Shi Jiu Tuo	15	-	-	-
Shuangtaizihekou NNR	14	63 641	25 780	-
Dong Sha	13	72 584	244 176	44 737
Namyang Man	12	53 359	26 470	2 303
Asan Man	11	70 507	10 362	635
Yalu Jiang NNR	10	151 708	-	-
Geum Gang Hagu	10	34 198	12 212	4 084
Yeong Jong Do	10	22 886	21 038	240
Ganghwa Do	9	28 715	15 317	1 183
Jiu Duan Sha	7	5 780	843	4 190
Chongming Dao PNR	6	24 770	2 889	4 871
Nakdong Gang Hagu	4	14 198	2 857	-
Suncheon Man	4	14 170	3 443	3 770
Aphae Do	4	12 862	9 162	606
Seosan Reclaimed Area	3	10 696	408	-
Meian Gun Tidal Flat	3	2 180	6 466	585
Linghekou	2	34 445	-	-
Hampyeong Man	2	5 728	6 549	964
Daebu Do	1	-	3 668	-
Paeksu Tidal Flat	1	1 511	2 060	-
Hongwon Ri	1	-	-	-
Mundok MBWR	1	-	-	-

Fortunately, hunting appears to be a minor threat to shorebirds in the Yellow Sea, with the exception being the Yangtze estuary where the activity is reportedly declining.

Of particular concern is the ongoing reclamation of the Mangyeung and Dongjin estuaries as part of the 401 km² Saemangeum Reclamation Project. These South Korean estuaries form the single most important site in the Yellow Sea, with a single-day count of 155,000 shorebirds which included 86,000 Great Knot comprising 30% of the species's breeding population. These two estuaries support the highest recorded concentrations in the Yellow Sea during northward migration of three species, and during southward migration of seven.

The adverse effects of the different threats, which all reduce food supply, can cause serious problems for shorebirds, especially on northward migration when they have to meet a very tight schedule on the breeding grounds requiring that they arrive on time and in good breeding condition.

Shorebird conservation in the Yellow Sea

Clearly migratory shorebirds are already encountering serious survival problems in the Yellow Sea, and these difficulties can be expected to increase. Thus, their conservation status is currently poor and is likely to decline further.

The traditional approach to nature conservation of creating a network of protected areas, with severe limitations being placed on human activities, is impractical in the Yellow Sea due to the very extensive nature of the intertidal areas in the region and the high dependence of the local communities on the intertidal resources.

Successful conservation will depend on the adoption of suitable national policies and plans for the sustainable use of intertidal and sub-coastal areas. These will need to be harmonized across the three littoral countries. Local community support will be an essential factor in creating the necessary political environment for the development and successful implementation of these policies and plans.

The concern of China, North Korea and South Korea about the serious environmental problems in the Yellow Sea has led to the development of one bilateral project and three unilateral projects. However, the exceptional importance of Yellow Sea biodiversity, both on a global scale and as a shared resource for the three littoral countries, makes it highly desirable that conservation be implemented on an ecoregion-basis.

Therefore, it is encouraging that World Wide Fund for Nature-Japan has commenced a project called the Yellow Sea Region Initiative that has as its core objective the maintenance of a viable, diverse and productive Yellow Sea ecosystem in the long term.

Only through such concerted and cooperative action will the future for the globally important biodiversity of the Yellow Sea become brighter and the prospects of the millions of shorebirds passing through the region more promising.

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The monograph can be downloaded from: www.ea.gov.au/water/wetlands/mwp/yellow-sea.html or www.wetlands.org/pubs&/SYSwebnote.htm; or is available on CD-ROM by contacting the author.

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Larger population of Black-necked Cranes *Grus nigricollis* recorded in Yunnan and Guizhou, People's Republic of China

The Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* is the only high-altitude crane among the 15 species in the world. Its range covers 28–38° N and 78–104° E, stretching from the Altun and Kunlun Mountain ranges east to the Qilian and Wumeng Mountain ranges, and south to Himalayas. Based on a coordinated winter count, conducted during the 1991–1992 winter, the world population of Black-necked Cranes was estimated to be between 5,600–6,000, comprising three populations – 3,900 for the western population, <100 for the central population, and 1,300–1,600 for the eastern population.¹

The Yunnan/Guizhou Plateau of China is a winter home for the central and eastern populations of Black-necked Cranes, including: north-western Yunnan, and north-eastern Yunnan and north-western Guizhou. Due to the

remoteness of the region and lack of efficient communication between sites, past counts of cranes in this region have not been particularly accurate. In winter 2001/2002, the International Crane Foundation and the Yunnan Forestry Department of China jointly conducted a coordinated Black-necked Crane survey on the plateau. This resulted in 3,261 and 3,182 Black-necked Cranes being recorded on 18 and 19 January 2002, respectively, in this region.

Methods

Roost counts were used in this survey. In order to secure an accurate count, two training workshops were held for local observers before the survey, one in north-eastern Yunnan and the other in north-western Yunnan. At the workshops and subsequent field practices, 17 wintering areas of

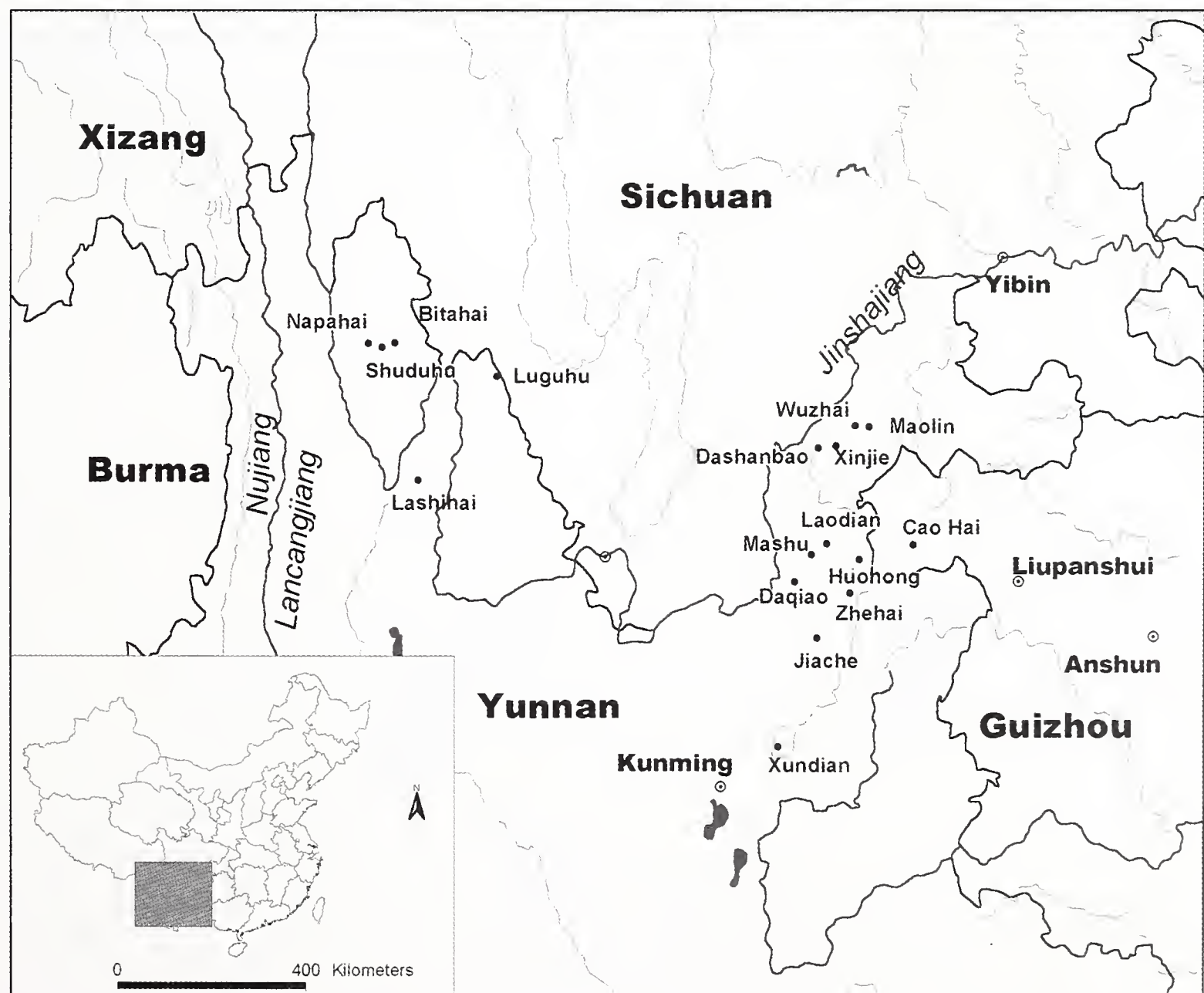


Figure 1. Map showing locations mentioned in the text.



Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis*. Photos by Otto Pfister (above) and Peter Los (below).



cranes (see Figure 1), with a total of 45 roost sites, were identified. 112 people from the region participated in the survey, with 2–3 people at each site. Ten pairs of high-powered binoculars (x20–30), six spotting scopes, and 34 pairs of regular binoculars were used to observe the birds. Observation teams arrived at the sites before 07h00. The count started at 07h30 and ended before 10h30. Besides Black-necked Cranes, Common Cranes *Grus grus*, Bar-headed Geese *Anser indicus*, and Ruddy Shelducks *Tadorna ferruginea* were also counted and recorded at all the sites above.

Results and discussion

Totals of 3,261 and 3,182 Black-necked Cranes were recorded on 18 and 19 January 2002 respectively, in Yunnan and Guizhou Provinces (see Table 1). Numbers of other large waterbirds recorded for 18 and 19 January, respectively, were: 804 and 1,158 Common Cranes, 1,759 and 2,978 Bar-headed Geese, and 3,442 and 5,444 Ruddy Shelducks. Of the 3,261 Black-necked Cranes counted from January 18, 2,189 were in north-eastern Yunnan, accounting for 67.1% of the total on the Yunnan/Guizhou Plateau; 304 were in north-western Yunnan, accounting for 9.3% and 768 were in north-western Guizhou, accounting for 23.6%.

Numbers of Common Cranes, Bar-headed Geese and Ruddy Shelducks varied greatly in the two days. For example, for Common Cranes there was 31% difference between the numbers of 18 Jan and 19 Jan, 41% for Bar-headed Geese, and 37% for Ruddy Shelducks. The reason for this variation was probably due to the mobility and relatively small sizes of these waterbirds.

Dashanbao and Cao Hai are the only two national nature reserves in Yunnan and Guizhou, designated to protect Black-necked Cranes, with populations of 916 and 768 birds respectively (based on the count from 18 January 2002), accounting for respectively 28.1% and 23.6% of the total population in this region. Overall, there are eight nature reserves at national, provincial and county levels in Yunnan and Guizhou Provinces, and they are: Dashanbao, Cao Hai, Daqiao, Napahai, Luguhu, Bitahai, Lashihai, and Zhehai. A total of 2,517 Black-necked Cranes was recorded in these reserves (based on the count from 18 Jan 2002), accounting for 77.2% of the total population, indicating the nature reserves have played an important role in the conservation of Black-necked Cranes.

The population of Black-necked Cranes has been increasing over the past decade in this

region. This increase may be due to: (1) no hunting of cranes in the last decade in this region, due to increased public education and increased efforts made to enforce wildlife law; (2) feeding of cranes in several locations, such as Dashanbao, Napahai, and Daqiao; (3) more sites covered by this survey than the previous survey.

Numbers of Common Cranes, Bar-headed Geese and Ruddy Shelducks recorded from this survey are only the populations within the range of Black-necked Cranes, and do not, therefore, represent the total populations of these species in this region.

Acknowledgements

This survey was made possible with donations from the Gordon and Shirley Rock family and Mr. Sam Evans.

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Table 1. Survey results

Area	Obervation site	Black-necked Crane		Common Crane		Bar-headed Goose		Ruddy Shelduck	
		18-Jan	19-Jan	18-Jan	19-Jan	18-Jan	19-Jan	18-Jan	19-Jan
A. North-western Yunnan									
Luguahu	Zhudicaohai			3		19	23	21	27
	Langfangcaohai					7	9	17	28
Bitahai	Xiaobita	17	32					6	4
Napahai	Xiaxue	220	220	2	2	236	236	530	532
	Chunzong	61	72			67	97	72	102
Shuduhu	Shuduhu						12		
Lashihai	Wenbihai							8	12
	Meiquanhe			7	9			197	221
	Haidong			2	2	330	353	302	256
	Hainan	4	4				14	4	14
	Junliang				24			317	458
	Gele	2		6	4	80	421	54	28
Regional total		304	328	20	41	739	1,165	1,528	1,682
B. North-eastern Yunnan									
Daqiao	Haizitou	20	20	23	23	14	14	27	27
	Maanshan	11	50		16	63	103		341
	Lijawan	419	283	139	512	298	820	222	1,250
Zhehai	Haiweiba	55	89	19	3				
	Hulidong	24	101	10	6	146	180	486	648
Huohong	Changhaizi	16	16					26	18
Jiache	Jiache	48	48					231	231
Dashandao	Dahaizi	565	578						
	Tiaodunhe	234	245			16	17	130	154
	Lelizhai	48	40						
	Dayindi	69	67				7		25
Ludian	Wangjiahaizi	43	23	7	7			4	
Mashu	Dahaizi	69	73	21	21	71	71	120	120
	Kongjiaying	40	28					89	91
	Aijiahaizi	0	18	2					
Laodian	Yinwuhaizi	40	32	10	11				
Xundian	Shuicheng	54	43						
	Dabalonghaizi	28	23						
	Fenzanghaizi	2	2						3
	Qingshuihai							150	211
Maolin	Sanjiazhai	63							
	Maidihaizi	29	32						
	Dujiahaizi	59	69						
	Dahaizi	137	114					26	24
Wuzhai	Daxiantang	113	95						
	Longtan	3	3					23	
Regional total		2,189	2,092	231	599	608	1,212	1,534	3,143
C. North-western Guizhou									
Cao Hai	Huyelin	131	126	157	151		248		246
	Zhujiawanzi	97	93	15	8	28	4	60	65
	Bojiwan	241	198	71	38	48			
	Yangguanshan	105	190	177	210	263	246	156	37
	Wujiayantou	187	148	122	106	40	80	100	200
	Baimatang	7	7	11	5	33	23	64	71
Regional total		768	762	553	518	412	601	380	619
Grand total		3,261	3,182	804	1,158	1,759	2,978	3,442	5,444

Saemangeum – a vital wetland

The Yellow Sea, comprising the coastal wetlands and marine areas lying between South Korea, North Korea and China, is one of the world's most important yet threatened ecosystems (see Figure 1). Despite extensive reclamation projects, increasing pollution and unsustainable resource use, the Yellow Sea still contains more than 1 million ha of tidal flats, supports a massive fisheries industry, and is used by the entire world breeding population of the Black-faced Spoonbill *Platylea minor* and Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi*. It also maintains internationally important concentrations of a significant percentage of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway's migratory shorebirds, three species of crane and several populations of threatened Anatidae.^{1,2} In many respects the Yellow Sea can be considered the East Asian counterpart of north Europe's Wadden Sea (shared by the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark), and in terms of global biodiversity is at least equal in importance to it.

Within the South Korean part of the Yellow Sea alone, some 48 sites meet Ramsar criteria for identification as internationally important for waterbirds,³ with the most valuable of all centred at approximately 35°50'N, 126°45'E: Saemangeum (see sites 9 and 10 on map on p.36).

Comprising the two free-flowing estuaries of the Mangyeong and Dongjin rivers, the Saemangeum wetland (pronounced 'Say-Man-Gum' in English) is considered in various government publications to be the most important known national site for shorebirds, and by Barter² to be the single most important shorebird site in the *whole* Yellow Sea. Saemangeum comprises some 30,000 ha of tidal flats (being up to 25 km wide in some stretches) and 10,000 ha of shallows, and supports possibly 30 species of waterbird in internationally important concentrations. No fewer than eight of these are believed to be globally threatened.⁴ Recent significant counts include a day peak of 155,000 shorebirds, including over 80,000 Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* (Gosbell unpubl. data). In addition, counts of threatened waterbirds include over 700 of the Vulnerable Saunders's Gull, the world's highest recent count of the Endangered Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*, and up to 200 of the fast-declining Vulnerable but probably now qualifying as Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaeus*.

Saemangeum should be one of the best-known wetlands in East Asia; it should be conserved and managed sustainably in accordance with the obligations of the Ramsar Convention, which South Korea acceded to in 1997. However, the entire area of 40,100 ha (401 km² or two-thirds the size of the Wash in the UK) is being reclaimed in the world's largest known ongoing coastal wetland reclamation project.

The first phase of the project, the construction of an outer seawall wide enough to take two lanes of traffic and over 5 m high, started in 1991, and despite increasing concerns is still ongoing in 2003 with over 60% of the 33 km long wall already completed. Its completion will mean the loss of almost 100% of the existing tidal flat, and will lead to significant declines in many waterbird populations.

As proposed the wall will eventually dam off both estuaries in order to create 28,300 ha of rice-field and industrial land, and 11,800 ha of barrage

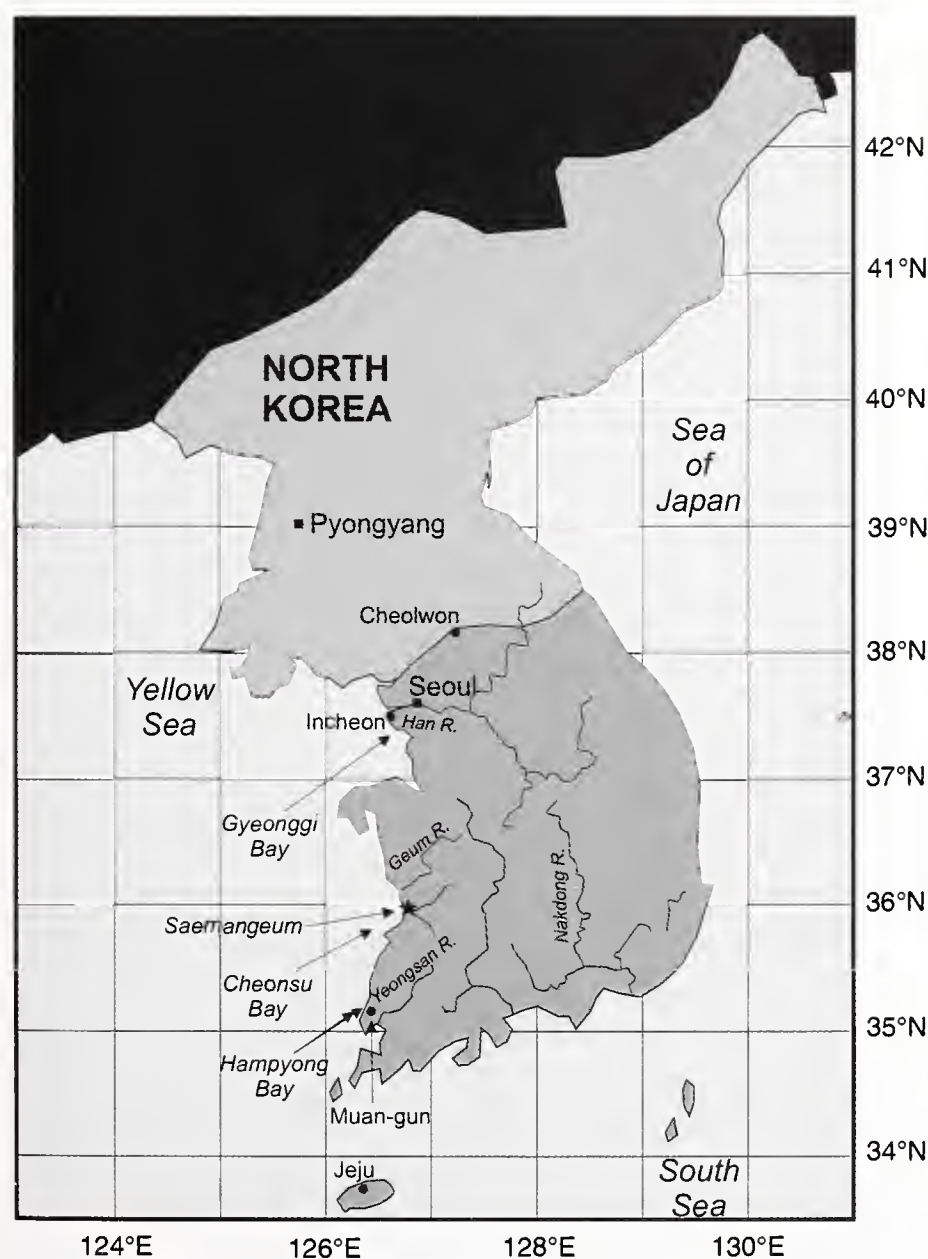


Figure 1. Map of Korea showing location of Saemangeum

lake. As proposed, it will probably be completed by 2006, with the gradual conversion of the tidal flats to rice-fields following a few years later.

The stated aims of this reclamation project are both to increase national territory and to create more land for rice culture. The tidal flats are, of course, already part of South Korean territory, and whilst food production and security is vital to any nation, a shift in national diet away from rice, combined with advances in rice-growing technology, has led to a massive annual rice surplus in South Korea since 1996. (The surplus, twice that advised by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, even threatens a rice price collapse.) Informed commentators confidently identify that regional politics (the incumbent president, Kim-Dae Jung, was born in a neighbouring province) remains the real factor behind the drive for this project.

Progress of the Saemangeum 'reclamation' has not been smooth, with significant financial and time overruns. Initially dreamt up by the military government of the 1980s (as part of a comprehensive 'Master Land Use Plan' targeting 90% of all remaining inter tidal wetland and shallows for reclamation) construction costs had already exceeded the original price estimate, with 2.3 billion dollars spent by 2001, and anticipated future costs many times higher still. The whole project was even temporarily suspended in 2000 to allow for some further research on possible environmental impacts by an expert panel. After a year of intense review the panel concluded that this project would inevitably produce significant environmental problems, including increased water pollution, declines in fisheries and impacts on other wildlife. The majority of the panel therefore called for the project's cancellation. Ignoring their calls, and after a series of delayed announcements, the government announced simply on 25 May 2001 that the Saemangeum reclamation was to restart in 'an environmentally friendly way' (government spokesperson, *Korea Herald*, 26 May 2001).

Despite a number of recent positive shifts in policy and initiatives pursued especially by the Ministry of Environment (including a UNDP-GEF Wetlands Biodiversity project still in the development phase) the government of South Korea still avoids the issue of loss of biodiversity through reclamation, instead insisting (1) that it is too late to turn the project back, (2) that local people want the development and (3) that the only environmental issue remains maintenance of adequate water quality in the barrage lakes to allow for eventual irrigation of the rice-fields. In

line with other such projects, there will be no compensation offered beyond one-off payments to fishing communities for the loss of their fishing rights, and no significant modification of the design. The regional fisheries industry, which both supplies a multitude of 'products' ranging from seaweeds through shellfish and crabs to fish, and forms the cultural core for many small coastal communities, is already in significant decline – a situation that will be severely worsened by the conversion of many harvested species' egg-laying and nursery areas into rice-field.

Is there hope for the future? The plight of the wider Yellow Sea has until very recently been largely overlooked by the international conservation community and ignored by international media. However, WWF-International has now identified the Yellow Sea as one of its Global 200 Eco-regions, and BirdLife International is also in the process of drawing up a list of Important Bird Areas within the sea.⁵ BBC World radio and Earth Report have started the process of exposing the Saemangeum issue, and there is now adequate information about the wetland on websites and in some conservation-oriented publications to help better inform opinion. Within South Korea itself, Kim Dae Jung's presidency (his image seriously dented by a series of financial scandals) came to an end in February 2003, and with this change the possibility of cancellation has again increased. President-elect Roh, although not apparently mentioning environmental legislation at all during his election campaign, is already establishing a reputation for challenging corrupt money politics and for increasing government transparency. Mindful of several failed and extremely destructive reclamation projects (most notably Shihwa, where plans to use reclaimed land for agriculture had to be given up due to poor design and extreme pollution problems) the Saemangeum reclamation also continues to be opposed by the majority of Korean people, by all the country's environmental groups, apparently by the two main ministries responsible for wetland conservation in South Korea (the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries), and by a significant number of international NGOs outside of Korea. Wetlands International, BirdLife International, the RSPB and Friends of the Earth International have all sent letters of protest against the project.

With so little time left before the outer dyke is completed, it is essential that leading NGOs and

concerned individuals do not give up the fight for Saemangeum. South Korea, a nation that has achieved miraculous growth and development over the past few decades, remains both open to change and improvement, and is sensitive to international criticism. Letters sent to Korean embassies in home countries, to relevant media (including English language newspapers in Korea), and to officials responsible for environmental policy in their own countries, as well as to the office of the new president, will continue to encourage domestic opposition to the project, and empower sections of society, business and government to again demand for the project to be stopped. With heightened awareness and a new president, there must still be hope for Saemangeum and its enormously important biodiversity.

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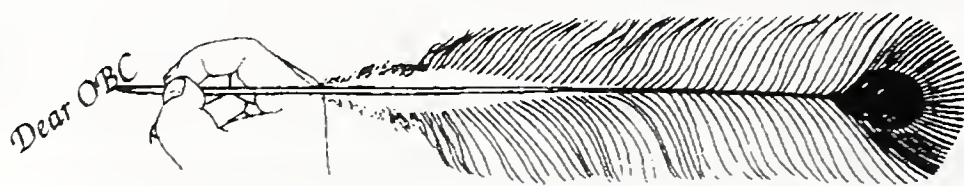
See also WBKEnglish website, article on Saemangeum: www.wbkenglish.com/saemank.asp

Nial Moores and Charlie Moores, No. 1207, 101 Dong, Samik Daeyon Beach Apart 1808, Daeyon 3-Dong, nam-Gu, Busan Coty, South Korea.



Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, Mai Po, Hong Kong, 6 Apr 1999. Photo by Ray Tipper.

To the Editor



Adult male Oriental Honey-buzzards (race *torquatus*) have yellow eyes

Adult male Oriental Honey-buzzards *Pernis ptilorynchus* of the race *torquatus* are shown in del Hoyo *et al.*¹ as having dark (brown) eyes, the same as those of the races *ruficollis* (Grimmett *et al.*²) and *orientalis* (Morioka *et al.*³). However, as the enclosed photos show, they have yellow eyes (see page 51).

Adult males are easily determined by their tail pattern, dark tail with a wide white band, and grey on the sides of their faces. Both birds in the photos show these sex characters and are definitely males. It is interesting to note that the eye colour of adult male *torquatus* is shown correctly in Ferguson-Lees and Christie,⁴ but this is most likely only because they incorrectly illustrated and described yellow eyes for adult males of *orientalis* and *ruficollis*. The illustration of adult male Oriental Honey-buzzard (Crested Honey-buzzard) of the race *torquatus* in del Hoyo¹ not only shows the wrong eye colour but also shows too short a crest. Robson⁵ illustrates and describes only the *ruficollis* race of the Oriental Honey-buzzard, including showing dark eyes for adult males, but includes no description of the race *torquatus* nor mentions any differences between it and *ruficollis*.

We realise that we are presenting only two examples of eye colour in adult males of the race *torquatus* but these are the only photographs of this form that we are aware of. We feel that all adult males of this form have yellow eyes. Considering the differences in eye colour of adult males and length of the crest between *torquatus* and the races *ruficollis* and *orientalis*, perhaps the taxonomic status of the races of Oriental Honey-buzzard should be reexamined.

We would be very interested to look at any other photographs of adult male Oriental Honey-buzzards of the race *torquatus*.

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Notable records from Yunnan, May 2002

According to Harrap and Quinn,¹ the breeding biology of the Yunnan Nuthatch *Sitta yunnanensis*, endemic to south-west China, is apparently unknown. I saw two pairs collecting food for young at Lijiang, Yunnan, on 31 May 2002 in a copse of large, old pine trees (see photo on page 51). One pair visited a nest in a hole 8 m up in a dead pine at the lower edge of the copse near the top of Elephant Mountain, c. 2,600m asl, above Black Dragon Pool Park. The hole appeared to be an enlarged woodpecker nest hole. The birds made several visits to the nest during the short period of observation, and were very noisy, possibly because of my presence. The voice was a rapidly repeated scold – a single grating ‘note’ with some variation, which could continue for several minutes without stopping. The other pair was at the upper edge of the copse, a few hundred metres away, but I did not see the nest. There were many younger pines in this area, apparently planted by man, some being quite large and fairly old, but no nuthatches were located in them, although I did not search exhaustively. The area is also noted for sightings of Giant Nuthatch *Sitta magna* (J. Hornskov pers. comm.) but none was seen by me.

I also encountered Rufous-tailed Babbler *Chrysomma (Moupinia) poecilotis* here, on the scrubby hillside just beyond the second pair of nuthatch. The voice of this species, endemic to the mountains of Sichuan and Yunnan, is not recorded,² and so it is of some interest that I was able to tape a long sequence of its song. This was given with white throat prominently puffed out and mostly consisted of a musical ‘pi peee’, the latter ‘note’ rising in intonation, preceded some of the time by one or two short ‘twit’s.

I was also able to tape the ‘song’ of the scarce Collared Myna *Acridotheres albocinctus*, the voice

of which is undescribed.³ This was at the western edge of Ruili in south-west Yunnan, on 25 May 2002. A pair sang for several minutes, a continuous jumble of musical notes not unlike other members of its family. They were nesting in a natural hole c.10 m up in a small group of acacia-type trees c.800 m asl. One with food entered the hole after waiting some time, while the other appeared to mate-guard atop a nearby tree. I did not see either leave but a few minutes later saw one with a large acacia leaf in its beak. It moved perches a few times but was still present when I left after several minutes. Later in the day, they were still in the area collecting food.

The recordings of all three species have been deposited at BLOWS.

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1 Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorynchus*. Race *torquatus* on the left and *orientalis* on the right. Note the yellow eye of the *torquatus*. Taman Golf, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, 24 Jan 2003. Photo by Laurence Poh.



3 Yunnan Nuthatch *Sitta yunnanensis*, Lijiang, Yunnan, China, 31 May 2002.
Photo by Jon Hornbuckle.

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2 Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorynchus torquatus*. Male (right) and female (left). Note the yellow eye. Taman Golf, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, 29 Jan 2003. Photo by Laurence Poh.

Photospot



Red-billed Blue Magpie
Urocissa erythrorhyncha,
Chebaling, Guangdong,
China, April 2002. Photo
by John Holmes.

Red-faced Malkoha
Phaenicophaeus
pyrrhocephalus, Sinharaja
Forest Reserve, Sri Lanka,
April 2002. Photo by
Palitha Antony.





Recently Published

A field guide to the birds of Thailand. By Craig Robson. New Holland, London, 2002. 272 pp, 128 colour plates. Hardback £24.99. ISBN 1-84330-058-3.

After the publication in 2000 of his highly acclaimed *A field guide to the birds of South-East Asia* Robson now presents us with an up-to-date, hardback field guide for Thailand. Just 14 of the 272 pages are devoted to Contents, Introduction, Avian Topography, Glossary, Index, Bibliography and Acknowledgments. The meat of the book is the 128 plates and facing-page identification texts which include small distribution maps for Thailand.

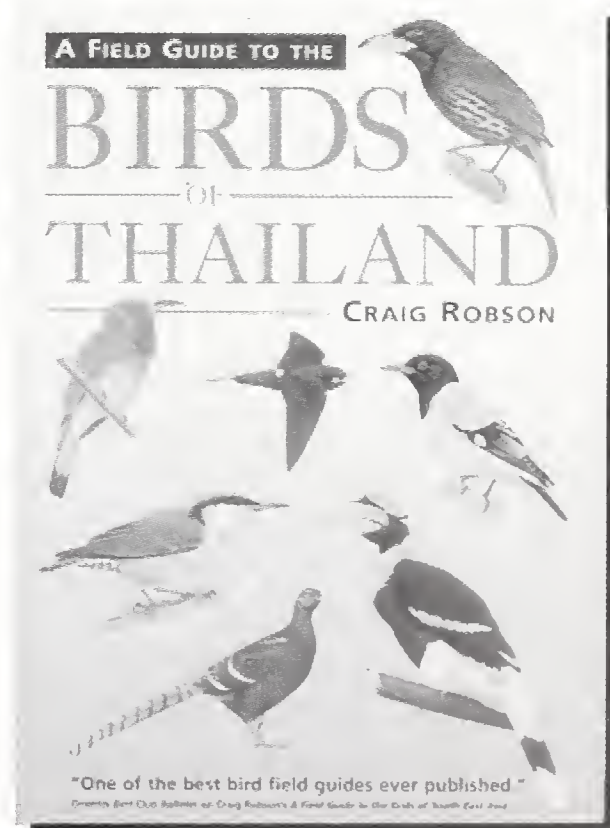
Although the sequence of species is much as in the earlier book, following Sibley & Monroe (1990), there are a number of variations in order to balance out the plates and to give direct comparisons of similar species. The taxonomy and nomenclature show just two changes: following its recent split from Long-billed Vulture *Gyps indicus*, Slender-billed Vulture is now *G. tenuirostris*, and the distinctive Green-backed Flycatcher *Ficedula elisae* is split from Narcissus Flycatcher *F. narcissina*.

The illustrations of 949 species taken from the earlier book, together with new ones for three fairly recent additions to the Thai list and a few new flight images, have all been rearranged into 128 new plates. Six species new to Thailand since mid-February 2001, namely Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Mountain Peacock Pheasant *Polyplectron inopinatum*, Long-tailed Wren Babbler *Spelaornis chocolatinus*, Blue Nuthatch *Sitta azurea*, Mountain Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus trivirgatus* and Chestnut-cheeked Starling *Sturnus philippensis*, are excluded. With an average of just 7.4 species per plate, the plates are far less congested than in the first book, which has 104 plates covering 1,240 species (11.9 species per plate). Colour reproduction is a little pallid on some plates in the new guide, most noticeably with the green pigeons on plate 30 and the snipes on plate 34 and, as in the first book, the relative size of Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus* to the other thrushes on plate 84 is very much exaggerated. Inevitably, several plates now combine the work of two artists and on plates 76 and 78 they do not really gel together.

The facing-page species texts are arranged in two columns. With so few species on most of the plates the corresponding texts are quite detailed and include plenty of information on vocalisations, habitat and behaviour, and altitude limits. Also included are very small, colour-coded distribution maps for Thailand, which are up-to-date and will be very useful, especially to first-time visitors. When checking them critically I found a magnifying glass useful and this enabled me see that at some stage in production the small purple spot locating the single winter record of Pink-rumped Rosefinch *Carpodacus eos* had fallen off the paper. The only other omission I noticed was the absence of Abbott's Babbler *Malacocincla abbotti* at Yot Dom Wildlife Sanctuary in the extreme east of Thailand.

The thumbnail picture index inside the front cover refers family or genus to plate number, and will be useful to the many birders who are not familiar with the Sibley & Monroe species sequence. But, on the plates, why have the publishers abandoned the familiar, practical convention of numbering each image by species (1a, 1b, 1c, etc.)? The usage of a different number for each image is very confusing and quite extraordinary. Furthermore, in the opposing texts these numbers are rather inconspicuous.

Despite the minor criticisms above, this is much the best guide for a birding holiday in



Thailand, but if you are venturing into any of the neighbouring countries you will need the earlier book. A Thai-language version would be hugely popular in the Kingdom, and would help promote the vital conservation of birds in Thailand.

Nick Dymond

The White-nest Swiftlet and the Black-nest Swiftlet: a monograph. By Phach Nguyễn Quang, Yên Vo Quang and Jean-François Voisin. Société Nouvelle des Editions Boubée, Paris, 2002. 297pp, 3 colour plates, line drawings and figures. Paperback (no price). ISBN 2-85004-103-3.

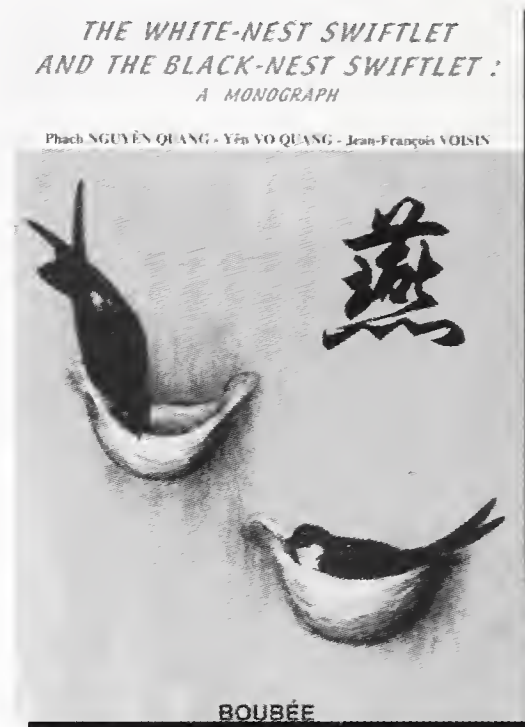
This important monograph will become essential reading for all students of swiftlet biology. It is the culmination of a long-term research programme into 'edible-nest swiftlets', conducted in the Vietnamese provinces of Khanh Hoa and Da Nang.

The book is exceptionally well-researched and chapters such as those on evolution, taxonomy, cave morphology, chemical composition of the nest and history of the bird-nest trade are not only thorough syntheses of existing works but contain many new revelations. Like most other students of swiftlet systematics the authors have not been able to resist the temptation to give their own views, and there are a number of differences from the taxonomy employed by other works.

Previous studies from equatorial latitudes with little seasonality have proved that swiftlets can breed year-round and have extended moult periods. Their Vietnamese representatives are not afforded this 'luxury' and have, with some overlap, separate periods for breeding and moulting. The importance of this fact to the sustainable exploitation of 'edible-nests' in Vietnam is paramount.

Early harvesting (with eggs in 10–15% of nests in a colony) allows *all* colony members to rebuild and the natality rate does not differ significantly from 'natural' first clutches. Harvest late, and the number of young birds produced will be reduced significantly because the breeding season is extended into a less favourable period with adults juggling moult, nest-building and egg-production with falling insect numbers. The authors recommend that the last harvest should be after all fledglings have left the nest.

The primary importance of this book will be as a guide for policy makers, who will read that it is possible to balance the needs of conservation whilst recognising the importance of the bird-nest



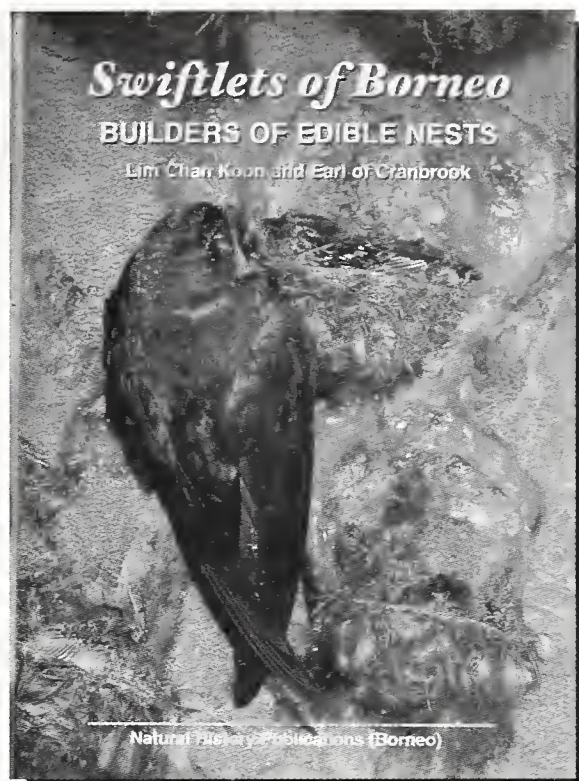
trade. The authors review population estimates for the important Niah cave system in Sarawak and give their own estimates of the global population for these two species as 22.9 million individuals.

They note that populations in six of the eight countries that host these most lucrative of all wild birds are steadily decreasing. Only the tiny Chinese population and that of Vietnam are increasing. In a book that is so data-rich, telegraphic and anecdote-free the pride in one single sentence speaks of the passion that has generated this marvellous piece of applied biology. The authors note that the Vietnamese population increase since the 1980s is "the consequence of a wise management policy." The Oceanographic Institute of Nha Trang, under whose auspices this study was launched back in 1981, invested wisely indeed in their home-grown ornithologists.

Phil Chantler

Swiftlets of Borneo: builders of Edible Nests. By Lim Chan Koon & Earl of Cranbrook. Natural History Publications (Borneo), P.O.Box 15566, 88864 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia, 2002. x + 171pp. 140 colour photographs and figures. Hardback £24. ISBN 983-812-060-X.

This book is dedicated exclusively to a small but important group of Oriental birds, and is a welcome relief after the many new field guides that have appeared on the Oriental region in recent years. It reads like a thrilling biological monograph on swiftlets and is a jewel with regard to layout, clear style of writing (avoiding difficult technical terms or jargon), and marvellous colour photographs of swiftlets and the various stages in their breeding cycle.



The harvesting and trade of edible nests existed in the 17th and 18th centuries and probably goes back further, almost to prehistoric times, although it may be more recent in Borneo. It is now a very important source of income for a number of states in the Oriental region. The edible nests are mainly consumed by the Chinese population and are an essential part of their belief and folklore, having purported medicinal and pharmaceutical values and a long-standing reputation as an aphrodisiac, in addition to the familiar culinary uses. As a luxury product, exports from the producing countries go mainly to the more prosperous regions of China (Hong Kong) and to countries with large expatriate Chinese communities (e.g. USA). In the last 20–30 years a drastic decline in the revenue from the edible nest trade has been observed, evidently due to over-exploitation, and urgent restrictions and regulation of the trade is needed to ensure sustainable management and the long-term survival of these swiftlet populations.

The book describes especially the biology and ecology of three species of swiftlets, the White-nest Swiftlet *Aerodramus fuciphagus* and the Black-nest Swiftlet *A. maximus*, which together produce the bulk of the edible-nest trade worldwide, and the Glossy or White-bellied Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta*, which produces a far inferior type of nest composed of vegetable matter only sparsely mixed with strands of salivary nest cement. In periods of high demand and shortage of production of the two main species, these nests are also harvested, a trend recently also seen in Java with regard to the related Linchi Swiftlet *C. linchi*. The nests of the White-nest Swiftlets are almost entirely made of pure hardened saliva with only an occasional small feather, while the Black-

nest Swiftlet incorporates its own feathers into its nests in a variable quantity, sometimes comprising half of the bulk of the nest. These swiftlets show a multi-brooded reproductive strategy, breeding in three (very seldom four) peaks, i.e. periods of prolific and dynamic laying in the annual cycle. In the White-nest Swiftlets the first peak (96 % of the population breeding) is from August–November, the second (94 % breeding) is from December–March, and the third (60 % breeding) from April–July. The same periodicity exists in the Black-nest Swiftlet which, in contrast to the two-egg clutches of the White-nest Swiftlet, has only one egg per clutch, but starts one month later. It is worth mentioning the relatively long reproductive cycle of these small swiftlets, lasting approximately three months, i.e. c.30 days nest-building, c.24–25 days for incubation, and c.45 days fledging period. The tiny swiftlet eggs (fresh weight 1–2 g) need a much longer incubation period compared to a hen's egg (c. 50–58 g) with 21 days. The outcome of the authors' research is that for sustainable culture of these swiftlets each pair should be allowed to finish at least one complete breeding cycle per year. The book also discusses the diet and foraging behaviour of the swiftlets, and the natural predators and parasites of these birds. A section on cave ecology shows that the swiftlets (together with bats) play a major role in the general cave ecosystem as their droppings, which are deposited as guano on the cave floor, serve as a continuous supply of external energy into the cave ecosystem. A very useful illustrative overview of cave nest sites in Borneo is given, with specific data of their production and nest harvest values. An important section is the 'home farming' or domestication of swiftlets as an industry, which started initially in people's houses, and later in specially designed concrete buildings (more or less resembling pill-boxes), thus artificially increasing the swiftlet population. This industry may, in the long run, have a great impact on other insectivorous birds as Borneo's forests and their carrying capacity continue to decrease.

In summary, this book is very well-produced and well-edited; it hardly contains any printing errors (I found only one after much effort) and shows no apparent flaws. I regretted, however, that in Fig. 17 the values of the axes of time against frequency on the sonagram are not indicated. But this is only a minor deficiency as on the following page the frequency range of echolocating calls of swiftlets is comprehensively discussed. Further, concerning the Waterfall Swift *Hydrochous gigas* (p.11) it is a pity that no dates or localities are

given for the Bornean sight records of this species. Also, some readers would no doubt like to know a little more about the mysterious Kinabalu Swiftlet *Collocalia (linchi) dodgei*, which may be either a separate species or a race of the Javan near-endemic *C. linchi* occurring far outside its known range, or an incorrect classification. According to the literature, only three specimens (collected in 1904 & 1937) are known to science, although Duckworth & Kelsh (ICBP Study Report 31) apparently saw good numbers on Mt Kinabalu in 1988. In short, *Swiftlets of Borneo* is a charming and appealing book, with superb colour photographs and containing much detailed and useful information on the ecology of swiftlets and the impact of humans on them. I can recommend it to anyone with a serious interest in swifts and swiftlets.

Jan-Hendrik Becking

A photographic guide to the birds of India including Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Pakistan, Bangladesh & Bhutan. Bikram Grewal, Bill Harvey and Otto Pfister. Christopher Helm, London, 2002. 512 pages, approximately 1050 colour photographs. Paperback £19.99. ISBN 0-7136-6403-7

Bikram Grewal has in the past ten years produced a series of photographic guides to birds of the Indian region, each one adorned with more photos than its predecessor. This time he has teamed up with Bill Harvey and Otto Pfister, both well-known and well-respected names in Indian ornithology, to produce a work covering some 800 species, out of the 1300+ occurring in the Indian Subcontinent. This is a considerable increase on the previous book which only dealt with some 500 species.

The nomenclature and order followed are those of the OBC Checklist (Inskipp *et al*, 1996) with alternative English names given in brackets. Half a page is devoted to each species with a few well-marked subspecies additionally so covered. Each species is illustrated by one or (sometimes) two photographs, the lion's share being excellent shots by Otto Pfister, but with contributions from numerous other photographers. The text is divided into fairly concise, well-written sections devoted to a description of the bird, its voice, its habits (including habitat) and its distribution. A small map showing the approximate distribution of each species is also included. An icon next to the species name indicates its abundance in terms of the likelihood of encountering it within its range and preferred habitat. Where appropriate,

another icon shows the global threat category assigned by BirdLife International (2000).

Like any work of this magnitude it has an occasional error, and some of the photographs are of lesser quality or poorly reproduced. However, the book is certainly a useful addition to the library of anyone with more than a passing interest in South Asian birds, or just for the pleasure of browsing through the photographs, as well as being fairly accessible for a relative newcomer to birdwatching. Although obviously intended as a pocket-sized 'field guide', perhaps the next edition might be in a larger format which would do more justice to many of the wonderful images that are reproduced at a rather small size here?

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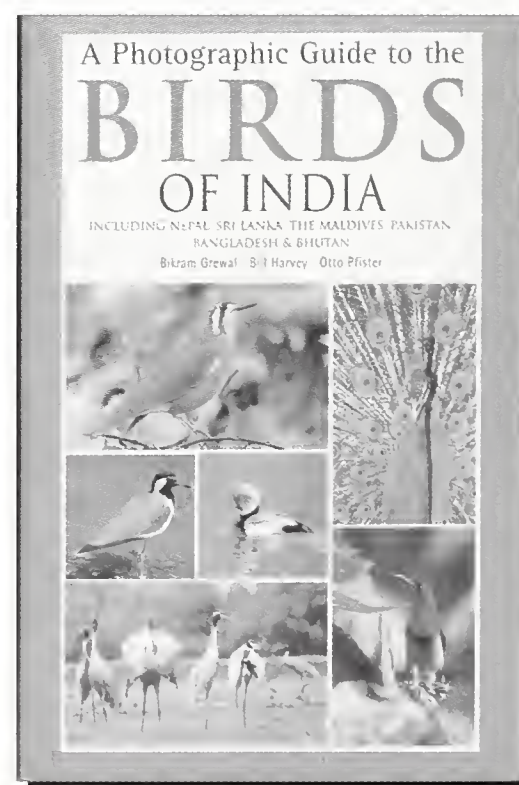
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Krys Kazmierczak

Also received in the same series:

A photographic guide to the birds of Southeast Asia, including The Philippines and Borneo. By Morten Strange. Christopher Helm, London, 2002. 398 pages, approximately 700 colour photos. Paperback £19.99. ISBN 0-7136-6402-9.

A photographic guide to the birds of Indonesia. By Morten Strange. Christopher Helm, London, 2002. 416 pages, approximately 700 colour photos. Paperback £19.99. ISBN 0-7136-6404-5.



Field identification of Tytler's Leaf Warbler

Phylloscopus tytleri

Introduction

In her comprehensive review¹ of the non-breeding distribution, morphological discrimination and ageing of Tytler's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus tytleri*, Pamela Rasmussen cites a number of misidentified museum specimens and questions the provenance of some ringing records from 1970. She goes on to suggest that difficulties of field identification have been a major factor in the mystery of the species's wintering range, and states that many sight records, even if carefully documented, cannot be taken as definitive. This may well have been the case in the past, but recent observations have indicated that the species can be safely identified in the field.

One of the very few authentic wintering records was of two birds found by Simon Harrap and Nigel Redman near Munnar in Kerala on 2 February 1985. They published details of their observation in a note in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*,² but the identification features of Tytler's Leaf Warbler based on field observations have not been published in OBC publications until now.

On page 23 of her paper Rasmussen mentions the recent finding by Trevor Price of an extremely high density of the species at one locality in southern Maharashtra. Having never seen Tytler's Leaf Warbler, and with information and encouragement from Krys Kazmierczak, I visited

this locality, Mahabaleshwar, from 13–16 January 2001, and was delighted to be able to make detailed field studies of large numbers of the species.

Locality

Mahabaleshwar is a popular hill station resort in a forested 150 sq.km. plateau at an altitude of c.1,300 m, just south of the city of Pune in southern Maharashtra, India. The journey by express bus from Mumbai takes approximately five hours.

Numbers and congeners

During two full days and two half-days in the field, taking mostly gentle walks along 5–6 kms of forest tracks, with warm, sunny conditions throughout, I encountered more than 140 Tytler's Leaf Warblers. At least 50 of these were intensively studied, often at close range for a long time. In addition, in descending order of abundance, I recorded Greenish Warbler *P. trochiloides*, Hume's Leaf Warbler *P. humei*, Sulphur-bellied Warbler *P. griseolus*, Dusky Warbler *P. fuscatus* and Western Crowned Warbler *P. occipitalis*, the total of these five species being considerably fewer than the total of Tytler's Leaf Warblers.

Field description

Size and shape: smaller body than Greenish Warbler, with markedly shorter tail; much as Hume's Leaf Warbler, but slightly less dumpy and with slightly shorter tail, and longer bill. All Tytler's Leaf Warblers showed a distinctly short tail at all times from any angle.

Upperparts: overall greyish-green, with barely perceptible brownish tinge; forehead, crown, nape, mantle, rump, wings and tail concolorous, but some individuals, presumably first-winter birds, distinctly brighter green on fringes of flight feathers. A creamy edge to the bend of the wing was usually evident, but none showed any trace of a pale wing-bar, and none showed any white or pale edges in the tail. Clearly demarked whitish supercilium, broadest in front of and above eye, narrower behind eye and extending past rear of ear-coverts with slight upward turn. Distinct eye-stripe formed by blackish lores between bill and eye and well defined, narrower dark olive line behind eye. Clear creamy half eye-ring below eye.

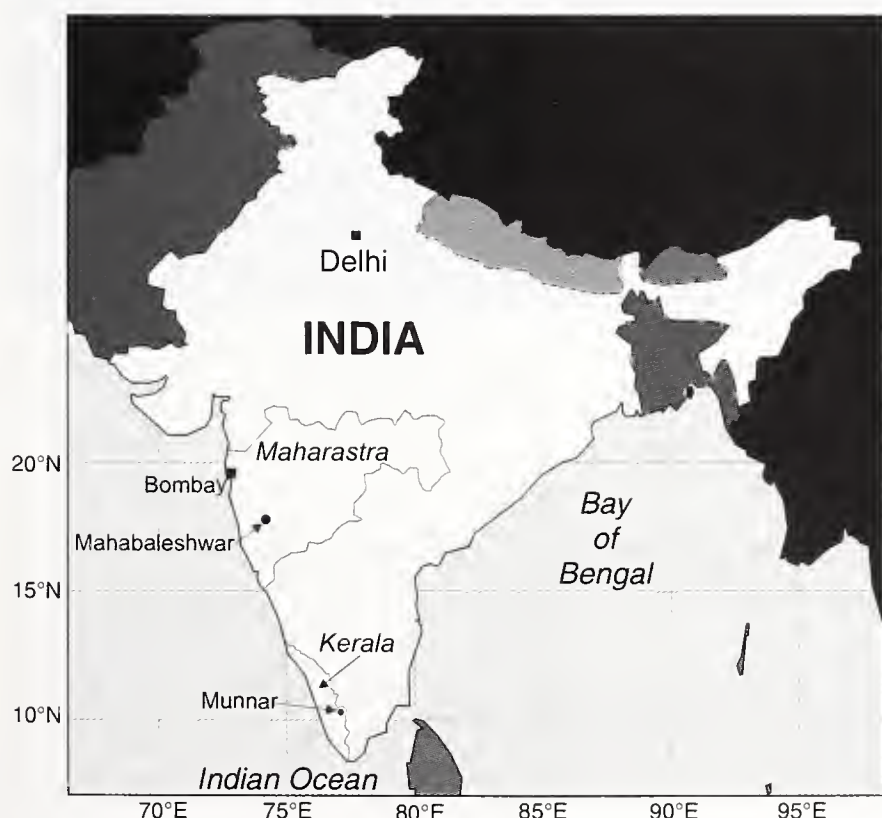


Figure 1. Map showing location of Mahabaleshwar

Ear-coverts unmottled plain buffy-grey, slightly darker along lower border.

To my eyes, none of the individuals I studied in January 2001 showed the strong brownish tones evident in the bird portrayed in plate 1 on page 25 of Rasmussen's paper, which was photographed in Kashmir in May 1983.

Underparts: all individuals had rather dirty off-white, even dusky, underparts, usually with a slightly brighter whitish throat offset by a slight greyish wash across the breast. Some showed a yellowish wash on the flanks and to a lesser degree on the belly.

Bill: long and slender, rather spiky in side profile; when viewed from below showed markedly concave profile to basal half, leading out to a very narrow, fine-pointed distal half. Overall dark brown, blackish distally, with some degree of pale brownish or dull yellowish basal cutting edge to upper mandible and on basal lower mandible, especially when viewed from below, but never obviously pale.

Legs and feet: very dark blackish-brown, with a hint of purplish in some lights; soles of feet not obviously paler.

Eyes: very dark or blackish, as in other *Phylloscopus*.

Call

The only vocalisation heard was a distinctive, slightly disyllabic call-note which I transcribed as *tsee-it*. The first note was flat, quite piercing and varied slightly in duration and loudness according to the proximity of other individuals, while the run-on note was sharp and upward-inflected. Each call lasted less than half a second. The frequency of calls from individual birds varied greatly, sometimes just occasional single calls or a short series of 3–6 calls, but quite frequently a foraging bird would call continuously at a rate as high as 28–30 times per minute. One lone individual foraging in the canopy of an acacia outside my hotel room called at intervals of 3–8 seconds for at least 40 minutes.

Once learnt, this call is quite distinct from that of Greenish Warbler and other *Phylloscopus*, and is diagnostic.

Foraging behaviour

The forest at Mahabaleshwar mostly has a fairly open understorey and middle storey, with a canopy height rarely more than 15 m and often rather less. Observation of foraging warblers is easy and can be continuous for long periods.



Tytler's Warbler *Phylloscopus tytleri*, Kaghan Valley, Pakistan, May 1998. Photos by Bjorn Johansson.

Tytler's Leaf Warblers were observed foraging in the canopy at c.12–15 m right down to the understorey at 1 m, but they mostly foraged in the 2–5 m zone. Some foraged alone, others in loose groups of 3–4 birds. I watched one group of eight which remained in close association for at least 20 minutes, hardly any of them calling at all during this period of intense foraging. Price³ states

that Tytler's Leaf, Hume's Leaf and Greenish Warblers hold territories throughout the winter which they advertise by calling. Clearly, this behavioural characteristic can be suspended during favourable feeding conditions.

Foraging was usually slow and methodical, and could even be described as pedestrian; rarely was there any sense of urgency. They never flitted here and there, and no hovering was observed. One particular species of shrubby tree was much favoured. Unfortunately, a specimen which was rather mangled by the time I returned to U.K. could not be identified, but it was probably of the family *Acanthaceae*, possibly of the genus *Strobilanthes*. In mid-January this shrub was heavy with flower and the sprays of densely whorled inflorescences were a great attraction to the Tytler's Leaf Warblers, but not to its congeners. A warbler would clamber around the sprays investigating each inflorescence with 1–3 deliberate deep probes of its bill until its forehead and lores were in contact with the flower. Most of the whorls were still in a very tight, bud-like condition and it appeared that the extremely slender, concave-sided bill was ideally suited for this probing action. Presumably, minute insects were to be found in the depths of the whorls, but none was seen to be extracted for consumption.

Conclusion

From my experience of watching Tytler's Leaf Warblers at Mahabaleshwar, I consider that the combination of small and slender body, short tail and very slender, spiky bill produces a characteristic jizz that, together with the lack of wing-bars, general plumage colours and diagnostic call-note, makes for a relatively straightforward field identification. Given reasonable views of a calling bird, worn-plumaged Greenish Warblers, the much drabber, brownish-toned Chiffchaff *P. collybita*, and other *Phylloscopus* warblers should not be readily confused with Tytler's Leaf Warbler. Certainly, in my opinion, other species pairs that can occur together in the Oriental region, such as Blyth's Leaf Warbler *P. reguloides* and White-tailed Leaf Warbler *P. davisoni*, or Tickell's Leaf Warbler *P. affinis* and Buff-throated Warbler *P. subaffinis*, present a greater identification challenge.

Acknowledgements

I thank Krys Kazmierczak for information about Mahabaleshwar, Tim and Carol Inskipp for encouragement to write this article, for commenting on a draft of it and for trying to

identify my decrepit shrub specimen, and Tim Lawrence for trying to persuade his Kew Botanical Gardens colleagues to name the shrub from my photographs. I am indebted to Trevor Price and Nigel Redman for providing me with copies of their papers, and for comments on a draft of this article.

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BIRDWATCHING IN THAILAND

Can't say anything more till you see for yourself how...
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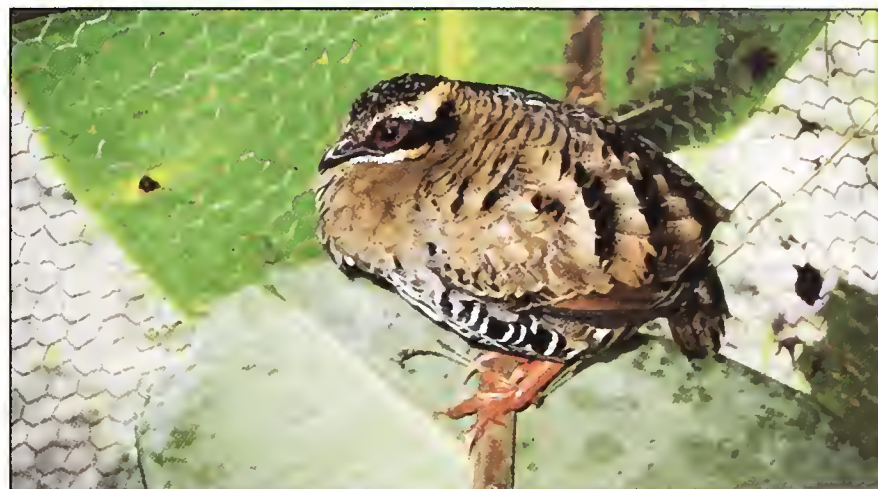


Endangered partridge discovered in Cambodia

The globally threatened, enigmatic Orange-necked Partridge *Arborophila davidi*, previously believed to be restricted to Vietnam, has now been discovered in Cambodia. A single bird was photographed on 18 February 2002 by a remote camera-trap deployed in southern Monduliri Province, close to the border with Vietnam, as part of a major new conservation initiative by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the Royal Government of Cambodia's Department of Forestry and Wildlife.

Orange-necked Partridge, a boldly marked but cryptic bird of the forest floor, was previously considered endemic to a small part of southern Vietnam, where it was known from just three locations. Since 1930, it has only been found at one of these, Cat Tien National Park, where it is considered to be locally common. The only other records derive from an area between Cat Tien and Monduliri which has not been visited by ornithologists for many years. In *Threatened birds of Asia* (2001), BirdLife International list it in the IUCN threat category Endangered, on account of its very small population and very restricted range, both of which are declining owing to hunting and habitat loss.

The record from Monduliri came from a bamboo-dominated slope in degraded semi-evergreen forest at about 150 m, similar to the species's highly specific known habitat preference in Vietnam. Furthermore, two *Arborophila* partridges with a striking head pattern comprising bold white supercilia and contrasting black eye-stripes (presumably therefore Orange-



A captive Orange-backed Partridge *Arborophila davidi*, Cat Tien National Park, Vietnam. Photo by Ina Becker.



The camera-trap image that proves the species's existence in Cambodia.

necked) were seen briefly nearby during the same month. However, the species's range in Cambodia is very probably restricted to this relatively small area of southern Monduliri, within which it may well be rare and localised.

Fortunately, however, Orange-necked Partridge stands to benefit from a unique new conservation project. Although the area is managed for commercial forestry by Samling, an international forestry company, for the past two years they have been working together with WCS and the Cambodian Government to promote biodiversity conservation within the concession, primarily by controlling illegal hunting. In August 2002, this pioneering initiative was formally adopted by the Cambodian Government. Now, Orange-necked Partridge joins a whole host of globally threatened species in this area that have a better chance of long-term survival.

Pete Davidson (pdavidson@wcs.org), Joe Walston (jwalston@wcs.org) and Colin Poole (cpoole@wcs.org), Wildlife Conservation Society Cambodia Programme, P.O. Box 1620, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

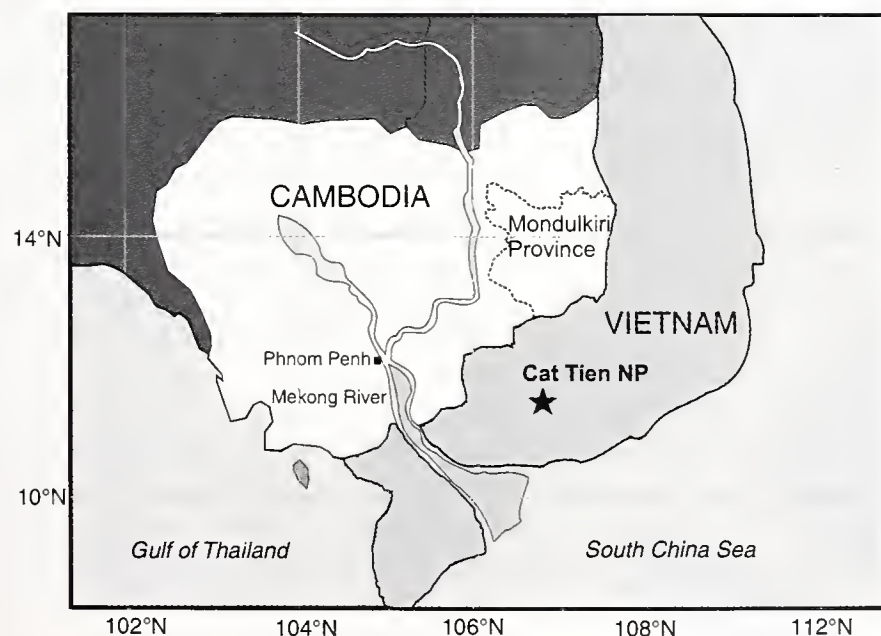


Figure 1. Map of Cambodia showing location of areas mentioned in the text.

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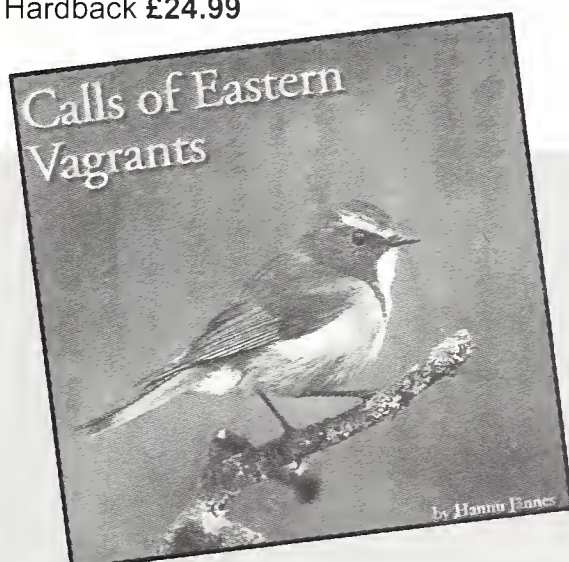
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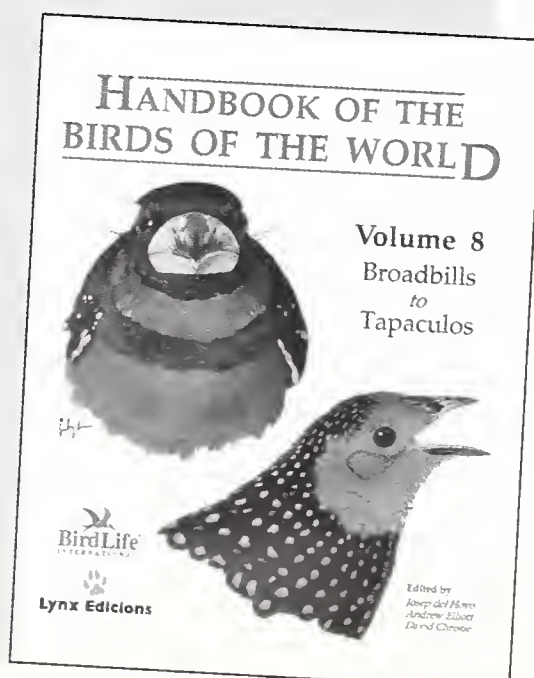
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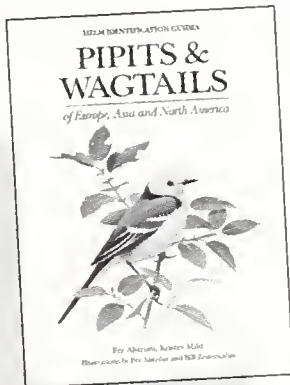
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On the discovery of a new treecreeper in China – *Certhia tianquanensis* Li

Treecreepers in Asia

The species of treecreeper *Certhia* in Asia had previously appeared to be well understood. Altogether six species are recognised worldwide,¹ of which one lives in the Nearctic (*C. americana*) and five in the Palearctic. Four of the latter are predominantly or exclusively native to Asia: the Bar-tailed Treecreeper *C. himalayana*, Eurasian Treecreeper *C. familiaris*, Rusty-flanked Treecreeper *C. nipalensis* and Brown-throated Treecreeper *C. discolor*. Only the Eurasian Treecreeper has a comprehensive trans-Palearctic distribution, including an isolated area in the Chinese Himalayan region, geographically separated from the northern part of the range in the Siberian taiga. The three other species occupy much more restricted ranges, the Bar-tailed and Brown-throated Treecreepers being confined to splinter areas, some of which are extremely small. The most important nomenclatural innovation until the publications of Vaurie^{2,3} resulted from the realisation that the Rusty-flanked Treecreeper

is a separate species, rather than a geographic representative of *C. familiaris*. Hence it came as a surprise when Li⁴ described a new subspecies of the Eurasian Treecreeper inhabiting Sichuan, China, namely *C. familiaris tianquanensis* Li, 1995. Given that five subspecies of Eurasian Treecreepers had already been recognised,⁵ and two older names from China had even been lumped with Eurasian by Vaurie,² it is understandable that this clearly characterised form escaped the notice of even Li's Chinese colleagues. It has not been mentioned in any survey of Chinese birds,⁶⁻⁹ nor have new finds previously been reported anywhere. Furthermore, the type series comprising seven specimens, in the bird collection of the Agricultural University in Ya'an, Sichuan, is not readily accessible. Thus the historical background.

Taxonomy

On the extensive summit plateau of the Wawu Shan (29° 38'N 102° 57'E), which is situated south-

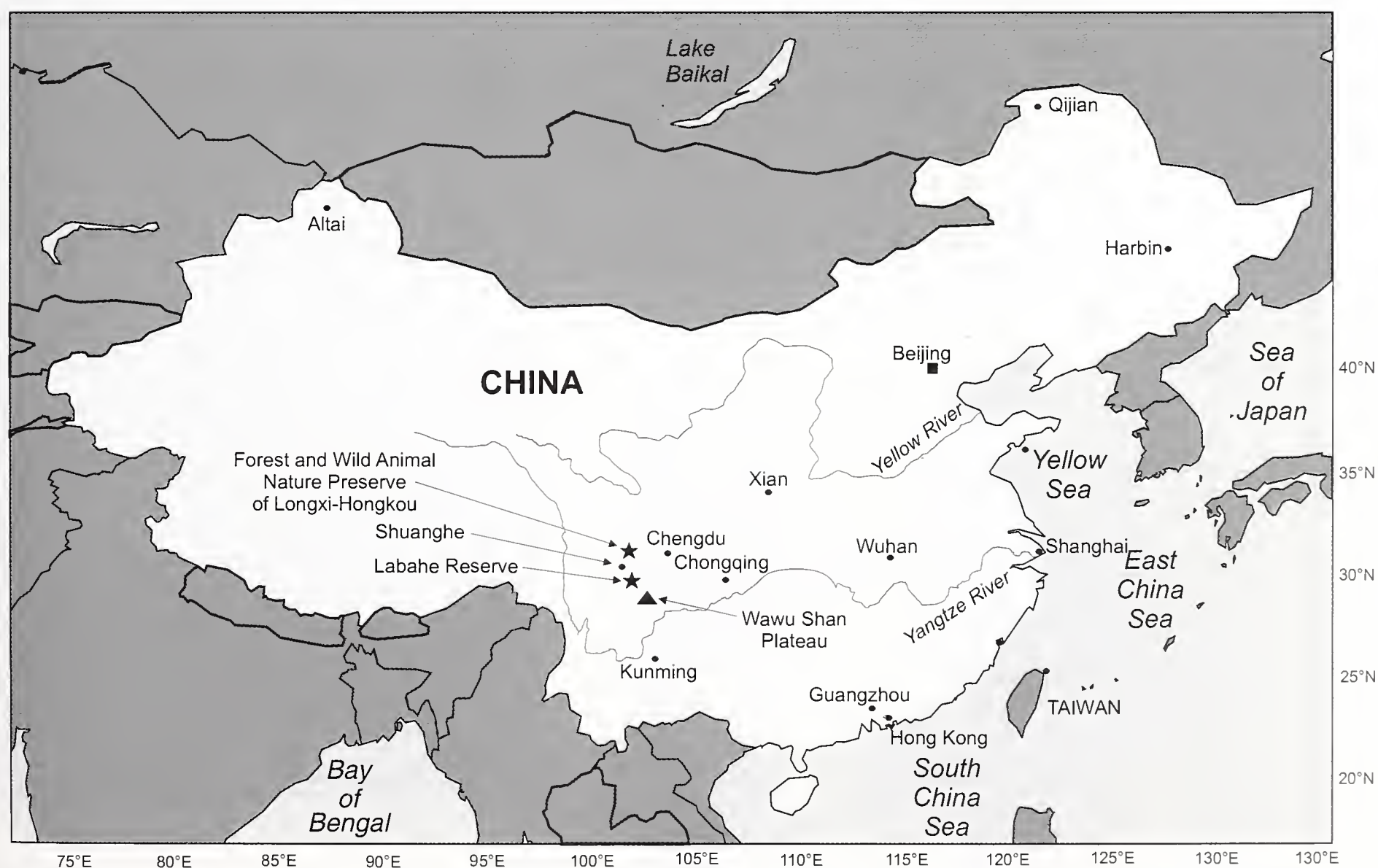


Figure 1. Map showing Wawu Shan plateau, Forest and Wild Animal Nature Preserve of Longxi-Hongkou, and Labahe Reserve

west of the Omei Shan, on 30 May 2000, J.M. and S.Y-H. observed a treecreeper that appeared not to belong to any of the known Asian species. Features characterising it as unknown included an extremely short bill (Table 1), a light-coloured throat but otherwise dark underside, and divergent vocalisations. During a later visit to the Wawu Shan Plateau, on 10–14 May 2002 (with Fang Yun, Bi Zhonglin and D. T. Tietze), we found this treecreeper at many sites, recorded its songs and captured several specimens.¹⁰ Its external morphology, voice and dimensions made it immediately apparent that it could not be a subspecies of the Eurasian Treecreeper. This became still more obvious when, in May 2002, it was possible to demonstrate that the real *C. familiaris* can be found in the biotope of the form we encountered. The latter is much less common there, and more difficult to document because of its relatively inconspicuous vocalisations. Two captured specimens of the Eurasian Treecreeper were assigned to the subspecies *C. f. khamensis*. Later we identified the population of the Wawu Shan as *C. tianquanensis* by consulting the original description and comparing with the type series in Ya'an. Martens *et al.*¹⁰ proposed Sichuan Treecreeper as the English name.

Relationships

Closer analysis indicates that the Sichuan Treecreeper should likewise be granted species status with respect to all the other *Certhia* species of Asia. Another species that is also, though less

extremely, short-billed is the Rusty-flanked Treecreeper, but its head markings and flank coloration are quite divergent and its voice is also very different. Its verse is even shorter and has a more uniform trill structure. The Bar-tailed Treecreeper is clearly distinct with respect to its extremely long bill (the longest of all Asian *Certhia* species), its banded tail and, again, its extremely different voice. Both species do resemble the Sichuan in the coloration of the underside, having a lighter throat and (only the Bar-tailed) breast region. The Brown-throated is most similar to the Sichuan in size and plumage proportions, but also differs profoundly. In all the Brown-throated forms (which otherwise are quite variable) the underside is always a uniform dark colour, sometimes smoky brown and sometimes rusty brown, but never noticeably lighter towards the throat. The bill is always distinctly longer in all *discolor* forms than in *tianquanensis*, although the degree of difference varies according to geographical origin.¹⁰ Acoustically, the gap between *tianquanensis* and all (so far examined) *discolor* subspecies is remarkable: all *discolor* songs are low-frequency, sonorous trill verses, and in the south-eastern populations (ssp. *shanensis*, *manipurensis* and *meridionalis*) a verse can comprise two alternating element forms. The frequency band of the Sichuan Treecreeper verse is extremely high (upper limit may be above 8 kHz). The brief trill (1.1–1.3 s) changes frequency markedly within the verse: the (21–32) elements rise in pitch, reach a peak within the verse and

Table 1. Measurements of all hitherto known skins of *Certhia tianquanensis*, carried out by: 1–5 ECK, 6–12 SUN, 13–14 MARTENS. – P Institute of Zoology, Beijing. C Museum für Tierkunde Dresden, Ch University Museum Chengdu, Y: Sichuan Agricultural University Ya'an, Bird Room. – WTI: wing tip index, TWI: tail / wing index.

	Specimen	Sex/total length	Wing length	Tail length	Bill length	Tarsus length	Hallux claw	WTI	TWI	Bill / wing index
1	P 49786	B& / 155	r. 74.5	76	13	18	9	18.1	102.0	17.4
2	C59560	B&	r. 71	~ 79	15	19.5	10	18.3	111.3	21.1
3	C61117	B&	69	70	13	19	9	17.4	101.4	18.8
4	C61119	B&	r. 70	66+x	<13	19.5	8.5	18.6	(94.3)	18.6
5	C61118	B&	69	~ 67.5	14	18.5	8.5	18.8	(97.8)	20.3
6	Y10572type	B& / 143	72	76	12.7	18.1	10.2	-	105.6	17.6
7	Y10698	@& / 143	66.5	71.5	12.8	16.7	9.6	-	107.5	19.2
8	Y10524	B& / 140	67.5	73	-	17.7	10.8	-	108.1	-
9	Y10688	B& / 143	69	72.5	12.7	17.4	11.1	-	105.1	18.4
10	Y10692	B& / 139	68.5	72	12.8	18.2	10.5	-	105.1	18.7
11	Y10468	@& / 134	67	73.5	11.3	17	10.2	-	109.7	16.9
12	Y10571	@& / 131	62	69	12	-	9.5	-	111.3	19.4
13	Ch 91.102	?	69	-	16	22.5	10.5	-	-	23.2
14	Ch 91.134	B& ?	72	78	16.5	18.5	10.5	-	108.3	22.9





1 & 2 Habitat of *C. tianquanensis* and *C. familiaris* on the summit plateau of Wawu Shan, predominantly fir forest *Abies fabri*. Note steep rock faces surrounding the whole mountain stock. Photos by Jochen Martens, May 2002.

3 & 4 Sichuan Treecreeper *C. tianquanensis* from Wawu Shan. Note the whitish throat. Photos by Jochen Martens, May 2002.

5 a) Sichuan Treecreeper *Certhia tianquanensis*, drawing of a specimen from Wawu Shan, Sichuan; b) Brown-throated Treecreeper *C. discolor discolor*, drawing of a specimen from Ting Sang La, Nepal (published by permission of Deutsche Ornithologen-Gesellschaft). – Originals by K. Rehbinder.

6 & 7 Skins (left to right) lateral view (6) and ventral view (7) of *C. nipalensis* (4 specimens, all from Nepal), *C. discolor* (2 specimens from Nepal) and *C. tianquanensis* (4 specimens from Wawu Shan, Sichuan). Photos by Siegfried Eck.

descend, so that the bandwidth first expands continuously, then constricts and again expands. Thus a clear rhythm is created within the short verse, which makes the song memorable; it so clearly distinguishes *tianquanensis* from all the *discolor* forms that it can serve as an effective isolating mechanism if the two should ever encounter one another in the field (for sonagrams of all species cf. Martens^{10,11}). Genetically *tianquanensis* and nominate *discolor* in Nepal are quite distinct. The distance difference of 8.8 % (cytochrome-b gene, uncorrected, 535 bp) indicates a long period of independent development; the two species probably became separate as far back as the Pliocene.^{12,13} No genetic comparison has yet been made with the rest of the Asian *Certhia* species but we are working on it.

Ecology

All Brown-throated forms live in the subtropical and tropical region of south-eastern Asia. Among the rich assortment of Himalayan species, this one always occupies the lowest vertical level.^{11,14} The Sichuan has so far been observed only in high-altitude Palearctic coniferous forests, between 2,650 m and 2,800 m in the breeding season, and never in the subtropical region. It may be that old coniferous forests (*Abies fabri* on the Wawu Shan) in locations that are not too high are the crucial vegetation on which *tianquanensis* is largely dependent. However, felling activities during the last century have practically eliminated this forest type in China. The plateau at the summit of the Wawu Shan was spared because the flanks of this table mountain are so steep: it would have been extremely difficult to build roads here that could support timber transporters, and no such roads exist to this day. On the other hand, access is possible by way of a good road that ascends to 1,650 m, from which point a cable railway runs to the top. There are hotels (small wooden ones, so far) on the plateau, and more are being built.

Further records

Once a large population had been found on the Wawu Shan, the Chinese-German team began an intensive search for further evidence of its presence — not only exploring new sites in the field, but also examining potentially incorrectly identified material in collections. The latter findings were rather sparse. In the collection at the Zoological Institute of the Academy of Sciences in Peking we discovered one specimen (Ebian, Ebian County, 29°10'N 103°20'E; 26.III.1940; wrongly identified as *C. f. familiaris*

and *C. f. khamensis*), and in the collection at the University Museum in Chengdu, two specimens (both from Shuanghe, Dayi County, roughly 30°50'N 103°20'E, XI/XII 1991). These two belong to the skin series on which the original description was based, but do not count as part of the type series, and Li did not cite the depository.¹⁰ In the field, the result was still more disappointing. In April and May 2002 we visited northern Yunnan and Sichuan in search of additional documentation. At the *locus typicus*, the Labahe Reserve west of Tianquan (roughly 30° 10'N 102° 48'E), which at the time was the only site where the form had been observed during the breeding period, we could see residual stands of fir in the distance, at about 2,700 m altitude, but there were no suitable access routes. In the Forest and Wild Animal Nature Preserve of Longxi-Hongkou near Dujiangyan (103° 35'E 31° 10'N), however, some documentation was obtained: on 24 May 2002, at an altitude of 2,650 m, J.M. was able to record three verses although the bird could neither be seen (it was identified by sonagram) nor attracted by playback. Evidently it had no breeding territory. At this site, on steep slopes, only small groups of firs were standing within an extensive deciduous forest. Hence the known area of the Sichuan Treecreeper remains extremely limited: there have been finds at three sites during or shortly before the breeding season (April–May), and at two others observations were made during the winter months March, November and December.¹⁰

Zoogeography

That a treecreeper so acoustically and morphologically (by its large size) recognisable should have been discovered at such a late date remains puzzling and demands an explanation. It must be that *C. tianquanensis* was already in residence before the large-scale deforestation began in China in the past century, but occupied only a tiny area and even that, perhaps, not continuously. As evidence, in 1914/15 — when the forest cover in Sichuan was considerably more extensive than at present — the German ornithologist Hugo Weigold, a member of the Walter Stötzner Expedition to Sichuan collected treecreepers at all seasons and various altitudes, but his 22 specimens (*C. familiaris*, *C. himalayana*; Kleinschmidt and Weigold¹⁵, did not include *tianquanensis*. Hence we can only regard the Sichuan Treecreeper as another relict species, with no particularly close relatives, from the mountain regions on the eastern slopes of the Tibetan Plateau. It raises the number (formerly 11 species) of endemics in the Endemic Bird Area 'Central

Sichuan Mountains'.¹⁶ Counting all times of the year, finds have been made at sites in an area extending N–S for about 180 km, whereas this range shrinks to about 140 km for those made during the breeding season. This is extraordinarily small for a tiny passerine bird with a non-insular distribution, and makes the total population very vulnerable. There should be an intensive search for additional inhabited places; in individual cases forest-conservation measures seem to be urgently required.

Field identification

During the breeding season the Sichuan Treecreeper should be sought in mature *Abies* forest at altitudes between 2,600 and nearly 3,000 m, possibly even higher, but the climate may be too inhospitable in coniferous forests above 3,000 m. The species is distinctly larger than the syntopic Eurasian Treecreeper; no other *Certhia* species have yet been found in the Sichuan Treecreeper's area. Characters to be noted are the extremely short bill, the darkish underside and flanks, and the whitish throat and upper breast region. The song has a bright, silvery quality, is loud and consists of a brief, clearly structured trill only slightly exceeding one second in length, very different from the song of the Eurasian Treecreeper.

Acknowledgements

On the expedition from April to June 2002 in Yunnan and Sichuan we were accompanied by Fang Yun, Bi Zhonglin and D. T. Tietze. Prof. Dr. Jiang Zhigang made it possible for J.M., D. T. Tietze, S. Y.-H. and Bi Zhonglin to participate in the expedition into the Longxi-Hongkou conservation area near Dujiangyan. The overwhelming hospitality of everyone associated with the city administration in Dujiangyan as well as those involved in forest and environmental protection deserves special mention here, as does the help provided by the guides and porters, who brought us safely through the rough terrain in the conservation area. J.M. obtained travel funds from the Feldbausch Stiftung, Fachbereich Biologie, University of Mainz and from the Society for Tropical Ornithology. Our sincere thanks go to all these friends, colleagues and institutions.

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Around the Orient

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Cambodia

Guide to Cambodian IBAs published

The definitive guide to Cambodia's key sites for conservation has been launched in Phnom Penh. Forty Important Bird Areas (IBAs) were identified in Cambodia covering 4 million ha, or 24% of Cambodia's land area. Commendably, 65% of the IBAs are included within the national network of conservation areas.

However, the inundated grasslands of the Tonle Sap and Mekong floodplain and the channel of the Mekong River and tributaries north of Kratie (crucial to the world's largest remaining populations of several globally threatened bird species) remain significantly unprotected. Colin Poole, Country Director of the Wildlife Conservation Society Cambodia Program commented: 'I hope the directory is an important first step in focusing attention on these neglected areas and proposing some long-term sustainable management options.'

However, there are some encouraging signs. For example, at Prek Toal on the Tonle Sap Great Lake where local people, many of them former bird collectors and hunters, have come together with the support of NGOs and the Government to establish a network of conservation rangers to protect the large waterbird colonies and ensure the long-term sustainability of

their area, both for themselves and the wildlife found there.

Source: *Birdlife news*, 27 March 2003 www.birdlife.org/news/news/2003/03/cambodia_site_guide.html

China

China protects its forests but logs its neighbours'

Asia's forests are being destroyed at a staggering rate, and the finger of blame is now pointing at China. Over the past three decades, Japan's hunger for timber helped destroy the rain forests of the Philippines and Borneo. Ecologists now fear China will chop down the rest, thanks in part to a cruel irony. In 1998, after devastating floods caused by deforestation, Beijing banned logging along the upper reaches of the Yangtze and Yellow rivers but to make up for the shortfall in timber, China is devouring forests from Myanmar to Siberia to Indonesia, much of it in the form of illegal logging.

China has become, virtually overnight, the second largest importer of logs in the world, trailing only the United States. China's entry into the World Trade Organisation has also driven tariffs for most timber imports down to zero, fueling imports as well as a rapidly expanding export industry in everything from pulp and paper to furniture and decorations, most of it destined for the United States and Europe. Zhu Chunquang,

Beijing director of the forestry programme for the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), said: 'China is not the only one to blame for the destruction of the rainforests, everybody has a role, from the suppliers to the consumers'.

Source: *Newsweek Online*, 22 January 2003.

<http://bulletin.ninemsn.com.au/bulletin/eddesk.nsf/All/017D7A2BB842501ECA256CB400071927>

Black-necked Crane reserve created

China has established a state-level nature reserve for Black-necked Cranes *Grus nigricollis* in the south-western Yunnan Province.

Covering a total area of 19,200 ha, most of which is over 3,000 m asl, the Dashanbao Nature Reserve accommodates more than 1,000 Black-necked Cranes. The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau is the major breeding base of the cranes, which spend the winter period on the nearby Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. The Dashanbao Nature Reserve is also the source of many rivers in China, including the Jinsha River, one of the major tributaries of the Yangtze, China's longest river. The State Forestry Administration plans to put the Dashanbao Nature Reserve on the list of the world's major wetland areas in 2004.

Source: *Xinhuanet*, 18 February 2003.

(See WWF China website: www.wwfchina.org/english/topic.php?topic=10¤t=20)

India

Indian officials 'ate protected birds'

Indian conservationists have accused senior government officials and prominent business figures in eastern Orissa state of eating protected birds served up at a club dinner. The conservationists said at least 100 migratory birds were procured for a senior civil servant's birthday party in the state capital, Bhubaneswar. The birds included Gadwall *Anas strepera*, Northern Shoveler *A. clypeata*, Eurasian Wigeon *A. penelope*, Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* and Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*.

Club manager Sanjib Pati denied that migratory birds were part of the menu but Orissa co-ordinator of the Indian Bird Conservation Network, Biswajit Mohanty, has sent a written complaint to Orissa's chief minister alleging that the birds, procured from poachers working at Chilika lake, were covered by the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972.

Source: *BBC News Online* http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/2676533.stm

Birds poisoned in tea plantations

A report of a large number of birds falling prey to insecticide at the Tilonijan tea estate in the Dibrugarh district has raised the hackles of nature watchers and wildlife enthusiasts. Though it is common knowledge that tea gardens use pesticides and insecticides, this is the first report of birds becoming the victims: several species have died in their hundreds in and around the Tilonijan estate.

Local conservationists found to their dismay that labourers of the estate had eaten several of the dead birds, while the tea estate management had washed its hands of any responsibility, saying no bird had been wilfully killed.

Source: *Assam Tribune*, 23 January 2003

Indonesia

Record sum raised by British Birdwatching Fair for Sumatra

The British Birdwatching Fair (BBWF) at Rutland Water, U.K. in August 2002 raised a record £146,900 to fund BirdLife's 'Saving Sumatra's Last Lowland Rainforests' project.

BBWF organiser Tim Appleton handed over a cheque to Birdlife Chief Executive Michael Rands at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London.

Indonesia has 117 globally threatened species, more than any other country in the world. Nowhere is the crisis facing Indonesia's birds and forests more severe than on the island of Sumatra, where 78 of 102 local lowland forest-dependent bird species are globally threatened or Near-threatened.

The money raised will fund targeted actions for conservation at five critical sites. This will be achieved by promoting local stakeholder Site Support Groups, reporting on the situation and public awareness campaigns. The five-metre-long mural of the Sumatran rainforest, painted at the 2002 Bird Fair by many of the UK's top wildlife artists, will be shipped to Indonesia where it will be used to help raise awareness.

Source: *Birdlife news*, 10 February 2003. www.birdlife.org/

news/news/2003/02/birdfair2002.html

Flores Green Pigeons thriving

The Flores Green Pigeon *Treron floris* (Vulnerable) may be commoner than previously thought, at least in parts of its range. Although known from many islands in Indonesia's Lesser Sundas, all recent records are from the relatively large islands of Sumbawa and Flores, where the species is rare and uncommon respectively. Recent survey work by BirdLife's Indonesia Programme has discovered good numbers of the species on the islands of Alor, Lembata and the tiny Pulau Besar. In eastern Alor, for example, one flock of 40–50 individuals is apparently the largest ever observed. These results suggest that the species is a small island specialist.

Source: *World Birdwatch* 24 (3)

Government to revoke logging licences

The Indonesian government will revoke the licences of more than a dozen forest concession companies that have failed to sustain their operations. Minister of Forestry Mohamad Prakosa said in December that a preliminary audit by an independent team showed that more than 50% of the 27 companies being audited failed to meet the requirements for sustainable operations of their natural forest estates.

By the end of 2003, 296 concessionaires out of a total of 412 logging companies are expected to have been audited.

Source: *Jakarta Post*, 16 December 2002

WWF report exposes how European banks contribute to destruction of Sumatra's forest

The study, *Elephant Forests On Sale*, shows that already 64 % – or 315,000 ha – of the Tesso Nilo forest, one of the last refuges for the threatened Sumatran elephants and a unique centre of plant diversity, have been converted into vast industrial plantations since the middle of the 1980s. The raw materials produced on these plantations end up as photocopying paper, cartons, margarine and sweets in European offices and households.

According to the WWF report, European financial institutions such as the UK's Barclays Bank, the German Deutsche Bank and several export credit agencies from all over the world share responsibility for this development, as they issued loans and guarantees for two giant pulp mills near Tesso Nilo.

Tesso Nilo is located between three areas that already have protected status. WWF is proposing that these be linked to the planned Tesso Nilo National Park and to each other by wildlife corridors. In this way, a protected area of 600,000 ha could evolve in which the resident animals, such as elephants, could move freely again without creating conflicts with people.

The report can be downloaded at: <<http://www.panda.org/downloads/forests/elephantforestsonsale.pdf>>

Source: *Indonesian Nature Conservation List* 6–15a, 14 April 2003

Government admits almost a fifth of forest has gone

The Indonesian government has indicated that destruction of the country's protected forests and conservation areas has so far reached 5.9 million ha, or 18 % of the total protected area.

Director of Conservation Areas at the Ministry of Forestry Widodo S. Ramono said that illegal logging and land clearance were to blame for the destruction of protected forests and conservation areas.

According to Widodo, Tanjung Puting National Park, Central Kalimantan, recorded the highest amount of destroyed conservation area (40,000 ha). Destruction of protected forests on the border between Kalimantan and Malaysia has also reached crisis level.

Meanwhile, Forest Watch Indonesia's Togu Manurung believed the actual total destroyed was much higher. He said, for example, up to 2002, the ministry presented data that the deforestation rate had reached 1.5 million ha per year, but recently the ministry revised the figure to 2 million ha. "Based on this experience, the ministry's data on protected forests and conservation area destroyed is usually lower than it actually is."

Source: *Jakarta Post*, 13 February 2003

Megawati starts her megalist

President Megawati of Indonesia joined staff from BirdLife Indonesia for a guided bird walk around a Jakarta park. During the walk the President was shown a number of species including Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula*

alexandri, Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis* and several White-breasted Woodswallows *Artamus leucorhynchus*.

The birdwatching tour was part of BirdLife Indonesia's *Birds Around Us* campaign that aims to promote interest and change the attitude of the Indonesian public to their native bird life. Unsustainable numbers of wild birds are currently caught every year for the domestic and international cage bird trade. Indeed a number of Indonesian species such as the Yellow-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua sulphurea* (Critically Endangered) could soon be facing extinction as a result of trapping.

Hopefully the President's newly discovered interest in birds will prove to be a positive factor in the future.

Source: *Birdlife news*, 27 March 2003 www.birdlife.org/news/news/2003/03/megawati.html

More Bruijn's Brush-turkeys

Belgian birder Iwein Mauro returned to Waigeo Island, Papua province in October 2002 following his discovery of the first-ever live Bruijn's Brush-turkeys *Aepypodius bruijnii* and a nest mound in May 2002.

On his second trip Iwein found no fewer than 28 incubation mounds in one small area! It would therefore appear that a viable population exists on the island.

See www.maleo.nl for more information.

Source: *World Birdwatch* 24(3): 5

Japan

A yen for cranes

The Wild Bird Society of Japan (WSBJ) has received a generous donation of 100 million yen for



Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*. Photo by Martin Hale (see p.76, Around the Orient-Taiwan).
Mekong Wagtail *Motacilla samveasnae*. Photo by Pete Davidson (see p.75, Mekong rapids update, Around the Orient-Thailand)



land purchase and management of a wetland and adjacent forests (a total of 368 ha) in eastern Hokkaido, Japan.

The area, on the shore of Lake Furen, Nemuro City, is a breeding site for Endangered Red-crowned Cranes *Grus japonensis*. The protected area will be named the 'Watanabe Sousanbetsu Reserve' in recognition of the generous donors, Mr and Mrs Watanabe. This is the seventh private reserve for Red-crowned Cranes established by WBSJ through land purchase in Hokkaido since 1987, and brings the total area protected by these reserves to 1,057 ha. WBSJ also manages the Tsurui Ito Tancho (Red-crowned Crane) Sanctuary, an important winter feeding site for the cranes, and the Nemuro Shunkunitai Bird Sanctuary, a breeding site for the species. Red-crowned Cranes play an important part in Japanese culture and were declared the country's national bird in 1952.

Source: *Birdlife news*, 13 April 2003.

www.birdlife.net/news/news/2003/04/red-crowned_crane.html

North Korea

Owl of anguish

Builders of the revolutionary battle sites and historic sites in the Mt. Paektu area caught a rare owl on December 15 2002. According to experts, it is a Ural Owl *Strix uralensis pallas*. It was seven or eight years old, 51 cm long and each wing was 30 cm long. The weight of the bird was 680 g.

Source: *North Korea News Agency*, 09 January 2003

Pakistan

Sunbird was highlight of attache's attachment

As India's expelled charge d'affaires, Mr Sudhir Vyas, left Pakistan for home in January, he recalled the high point of his three-year 'tense but eventful' tenure as the sighting of a rare Indian bird.

Not listed in Pakistan's birdguide, the sight of the Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja* among the green spaces of Islamabad in winter was a most memorable event for him, Mr. Vyas said as the species is not on the official Pakistan birdlist. The very 'Indian' bird is found on the foothills of the Himalayas and the farthest it came earlier was to Himachal Pradesh.

'Now it is good to see it crossing into Pakistan, especially in winter,' Mr Vyas said, sounding excited about his sighting of the bird. He felt there could have been more such sightings but for the stringent restrictions placed on Indian diplomats.

Source: *Asian Age*, 12 February 2003 (See also *JBNHS* 99:316)

Philippines

New website for birds and birders in the Philippines

Local birders in Manila have launched a new website — www.birdwatch.ph. It focuses on urban birdwatching around Manila and further afield. It's an attractive site and well worth adding to your list of Favourites.

If you have a website or online articles about birding trips in the Philippines, the team behind Birdwatch Philippines would be happy to link to them.

Contact Annette P. Tamino, Biology Department, Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City, Philippines atamino@ateneo.edu

Source: *Oriental Birding*, 24 March 2003

Thailand

Mekong rapids update

The Chinese government's blasting of rapids to expand and deepen the upper Mekong river is causing severe changes to the river flow in Thailand, environmentalists said in March. Local fishermen and collectors of the famous Mekong waterweed, or kai, in Chiang Rai's Chiang Saen district, have been seriously affected since Beijing started blasting shoals and submerged rocks in December 2002.

According to the Water Transportation Department, the river was at the mercy of China, which had cut the river flow every three days by closing their dams to work on the project. After the three-day closure, they opened the gates for one day to let the water flow downstream.

China, Myanmar, Laos and Thailand signed an agreement in June 2001 to widen the navigation channel of the 5,600-km river. Under the scheme, around 11 rapids would be cleared, nine in Laos, one near the Sino-Burmese border, and another in Thailand, known as Khon Pee Luang, between Chiang Saen and Chiang Khong districts. Yan Tingai, the Chinese ambassador to Thailand, defended the project, saying that it was too small to cause any severe environmental damage.

Source: *Bangkok Post*, 5 March 2003

Chinese dams threaten further damage to the Mekong

Blasting of the Mekong rapids to benefit commercial shipping is not the only threat to the river. A Chinese environmentalist has warned that new dams upriver in China will destroy the Mekong's ecosystem.

'At present, two large-scale dams have been built, one is under construction, and two are on the way,' Yu Xiaogang, director of Green Watershed (a Chinese non-governmental organisation) told a five-day public forum on River Basin Development in November. Mr Yu said China's first generation of leaders such as Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping saw the Mekong as a river which created a good relationship with neighbouring countries, rather than one which brought about economic growth. But the power-grid agreement endorsed in November at the first leaders' summit of the Greater Mekong Sub-region and China showed that Chinese leaders no longer had such admirable sentiments, he said. Under the agreement, some 32 hydropower dams within the grid are scheduled for completion by 2019.

Source: *Bangkok Post*, 10 November 2002

Gurney's Pitta supporters club

A group of Thai birdwatchers has set up the *ad hoc* Gurney's Pitta Conservation Group spearheaded by Uaiphorn Khwanphae. This is in addition to the long-running campaign by the OBC. The group has drafted a letter to the Prime Minister of Thailand telling him about the importance of the species and its habitat and reporting the heavy

encroachment to the forest at Khao Nor Chuchi, especially along the pittas' favoured trails.

They are also urging the Thai government to help local villagers help themselves. There is a government policy of 'One village, one product' and Gurney's Pitta has economic potential from ecotourism. The letter, signed by 230 Thai supporters, was due to be handed in to the Prime Minister's office on 25 March 2003.

Source: Patcharee Komolphalin, *OrientalBirding* newsgroup

And Gurney's Pitta online

And for Gurney's Pitta fans worldwide, there are some superb new photos by Khanit Khanikul of both male and female birds on the OBC Images website hosted by Indiabirds. To view them, visit www.indiabirds.com/obci/ and use the 'search' box to find Gurney's.

The OBC Image Database is growing steadily and now has more than 3,000 photos of around 1,300 Oriental bird species.

Source: Krys Kazmierczak

Taiwan

Botulism kills 7% of world's Black-faced Spoonbills

At least 71 Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor* have died following an outbreak of avian botulism at the birds' main wintering site at Tseng-wen estuary, Taiwan – an area declared an 'Important Wildlife Area' by the Tainan County Government just a month before this disaster. The figure could have been far higher, but thanks to quick rescue action by governmental authorities,

NGOs and volunteers, the situation was rapidly brought under control.

The first sick birds were discovered on 9 December 2002, when 11 were found on the mudflats at their main roosting site. By the end of the day 32 affected birds had been found, of which 16 were either dead or died subsequently. A day later, 41 birds were dead and 14 were in intensive care. By 20 December, 58 birds were dead, but the outbreak appeared to be under control. However, on 21 December, a sudden temperature drop caused a second wave of poisoning but thanks to rapid and specialist treatment, the number of fatalities only rose to 71.

The events of December 2002 emphasise that although a species is doing well – the Black-faced Spoonbill was recently downgraded from Critically Endangered to Endangered – when small populations are involved, they are all too susceptible to disasters such as this.

POSTSCRIPT: Some of the sick individuals were caught and kept at a rehabilitation centre. They were released on 18 February 2003. Each of the birds has a combination of colour rings on the left leg and a large BROWN band on the right leg (not the customary BLUE band used for Taiwanese BF Spoonbills).

Source: *BirdLife news*, 10 January 2003



From the Field

Compiled by Craig Robson

These are largely unconfirmed records covering the period from December 2001 to March 2003. We urge that, if they have not already done so, contributors provide full details to the relevant regional organisations in due course.

CAMBODIA

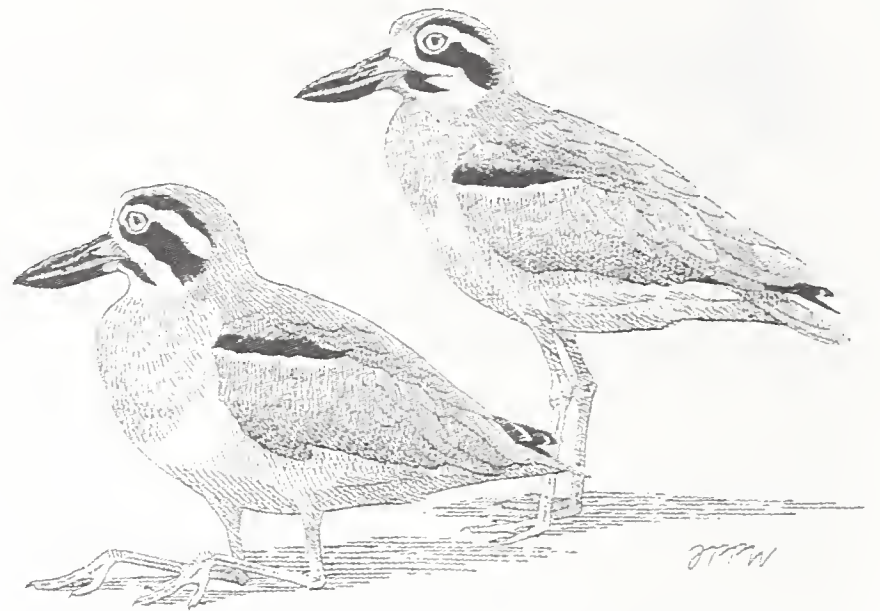
Two new species for Cambodia have been reported. A single **Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia* with **Painted Storks** *Mycteria leucocephala* at Ang Trapeang Thmor on 21st March 2003 (PMor *et al.* / Birdquest), and at least two male and two female 'stanfordi' **Rosy Minivets** *Pericrocotus roseus* at Kirirom National Park on 13th October (AT), and another male with a flock of **Small Minivets** *P. cinnamomeus* near UTM 0640958 1585816 in the north-east, on 25th January 2003 (JE). Counts at Prek Toal, Tonle Sap in 2002, included 100+ **Glossy Ibises** *Plegadis falcinellus* on 6th April (GT,CC), the largest count ever documented for the country, and 429 **Great Cormorants** *Phalacrocorax carbo* and 2,448 **Spot-billed Pelicans** *Pelecanus philippensis* on 26th December (FG). The total count of adult **Darters** *Anhinga melanogaster* surpassed 1,000 birds in two colonies during August–November (FG), the

largest population of this Near-threatened species recorded in South-East Asia for decades. In the north-west, at Ang Trapeang Thmor Sarus Crane Reserve, nine **Black-necked Storks** *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* on 29th June (CPr *et al.*), were the highest number to be counted in South-East Asia at a single site in recent history. In Siem Reap, commuting flocks of **Red-breasted Parakeet** *Psittacula alexandri* between Angkor (roosting) and Tonle Sap (feeding) were observed again in 2002. On 18th July, over 10,000 birds in six flocks were counted flying towards the lake, with no less than 5,000+ birds in one single flock (FG). At Kruos Kraom and adjacent areas, Kompong Thom, 23–26 **Bengal Floricans** *Houbaropsis bengalensis* were recorded within a 3 km radius of one elevated rice shelter on 30th June, the highest single day-count in the area to date (PB,HC,PD,SS). That morning a flock of 241 **Black-headed Ibises** *Threskiornis melanocephalus* were also seen, the highest count in recent decades



Tiger and River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii* by Nik Borrow

away from Prek Toal/Ang Tropeang Thmor (HC). In the north, in Preah Vihear Province (PB,TS,SC *et al.*), three visits were made to the area around Phum Takang, Kulen District during 12th September–18th November to monitor Cambodia's most northerly known **Darter** colony, and other large waterbirds. Although one colony at Veal Kanae had all the eggs from its 37 nests collected by a local soldier, another was found with 13 nests containing 22 chicks at Veal Roharl Kdan on 15th November. Up to 100 **Lesser Adjutants** *Leptoptilos javanicus* and a single **Greater Adjutant** *L. dubius* were recorded at Trapeang Kha Ouse in mid-November. In the north-east, one of the most significant discoveries in recent months was made in Coupe 5 of the Samling Logging Concession, Mondolkiri Province, where two **White-winged Ducks** *Cairina scutulata* were seen on the Mahaoch on 4th November (NMH,BR). This is the first confirmed record from the concession, and only the second in north-east Cambodia in recent decades (a pair was seen along the Dak Dam stream, which forms the international border between Cambodia and Vietnam in spring 1998). In Siem Pang District, Stung Treng Province, during November/December 2002 17 **White-shouldered Ibises** *Pseudibis davisoni*, 7–15 **White-rumped Vultures** *Gyps bengalensis* a single **Slender-billed Vulture** *G. tenuirostris*, 15 **Great Thick-knees** *Esacus recurvirostris*, 70 **River Lapwings** *Vanellus duvaucelii*, 44 **River Terns** *Sterna aurantia* and 60 **Mekong Wagtails** *Motacilla samveasnae* were noted (PH,DWi). A field survey in more northern and western parts of Siem Pang District from 3rd–15th November (RT,PB,PSo,DK) produced two or three **Giant Ibises** *Pseudibis gigantea* along the Khampha River on 5th–6th and, of distributional interest, were records of **Indochinese Green Magpie** *Cissa hypoleuca*. Surveys in Siem Pang District in late January (JE *et al.*) turned up a minimum of 23 **White-shouldered Ibises** and four **Giant Ibises** as well as a count of 121 **Sarus Crane** *Grus antigone* at Beoung Prek Lapouv on 30th. In the south-west two or three male **Silver Orioles** *Oriolus mellianus* in heavily logged forest (c.450 m elevation) in the central Cardamoms, on 18th December (APi,JPi), provided the long overdue second Cambodian record. Also of interest in the area were **Hill Blue Flycatcher** *Cyornis banyumas* (seen and heard quite frequently), and **Yellow-bellied Warbler** *Abroscopus superciliaris*, the first from the south-west. In Ream National Park there were 36 adult and five juvenile **Milky Storks** *Mycteria cinerea* on 21st July (TE,LW), the largest number recorded from Cambodia in recent decades.



Great Thick-knees *Esacus recurvirostris* by Jan Wilczur

CHINA

A tour to Yunnan Province during 3rd–25th November (JH,PS-H,DW), resulted in the customary batch of interesting sightings. Three species appeared to be new for Yunnan: at least 150 **Greylag Geese** *Anser anser* at Lijiang on 22nd, a single female/immature **Greater Scaup** *Aythya marila* in the Tengchong area on 18th and another four at Dali on 21st, and a single first-winter **Demoiselle Crane** *Grus virgo* at Lijiang on 22nd. Other rarities included a single female/immature **Baikal Teal** *Anas formosa* seen well at Tengchong on 18th, a single female-type **Mandarin Duck** *Aix galericulata* at Yunfengshan on 13th and two full-plumaged males in the Tengchong area on 18th, and three **Purple Swamphens** *Porphyrio porphyrio* at the north end of Lake Erhai, Dali on 21st. An incredible count of at least 30,000 (most likely c.40,000) **Red-breasted Parakeets** *Psittacula alexandri* was made at Ruili, W Yunnan on 4th, the only date the observers were positioned to get a reasonable count. Also of interest here were four **Rufous-chinned Laughingthrushes** *Garrulax rufogularis* seen well and taped-recorded on 9th (only the second record for China), and single **White-gorgeted Flycatchers** *Ficedula monileger* on 5th and 7th.

DPR KOREA

Some very interesting recent records were received from this extremely under-watched country (WD). New national records came with single **Common Blackbirds** *Turdus merula* in Pyongyang on 1st December 2001, and 23rd February 2002, and 24th–27th and 30th September (the first sightings having been made by the same observer on 2nd December 2000 (two birds), and 2nd, 14th, 21st January and 23rd November 2001), a single **Common Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita*

at Pyongyang on 9th December 2001, and a single **Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca* at Pyongyang on 9th and 16th December 2001. Vagrants included eight **Cinereous Vultures** *Aegypius monachus* flying south-east over Hyangsan on 8th November, the seventh record, single **Black-crowned Night Herons** *Nycticorax nycticorax* in Pyongyang on 13th–15th April and 10th October 2002, and three plus a single on 4th May, the first records since 1931 (apart from one seen by the same observer in Pyongyang on 21st September 2001), a male **Chestnut-cheeked Starling** *Sturnus philippensis* at Hyangsan on 26th May, the first claimed since at least 1956 (the only dated record is 1927), a single **Thick-billed Warbler** *Acrocephalus aedon* at Hyangsan on 31st May, the sixth, and several **Yellow-browed Buntings** *Emberiza chrysophrys* in Pyongyang, with singles on 2nd and 19th May and two on 13th September, the sixth to eighth records.

INDIA

Tibetan Lark *Melanocorypha maxima* was seen during a trek to the Markha Valley, about 4 km north-west of Spituk (quite near the Indus River), on about 2nd August (DS); apparently the first outside the restricted area and also the most westerly record to date. In the western Himalayas, at least two **White-cheeked Tits** *Aegithalos leucogenys* in a mixed tit flock at Chail (c.2,100 m), Himachal Pradesh on 29th October (NDy) were very interesting. A single **Nepal Wren Babbler** *Pnoepyga immaculata* was ringed and photographed on the western bank of the upper Tons River (c.1,000 m elevation) just north-west of Dehra Dun, Uttaranchal Pradesh on 24th February 2003 (BH,ND), and another was subsequently seen in the Tons valley forest (c.650 m) on 9th March (AS,SG,MK). A pair of **Ferruginous Pochards** *Aythya nyroca* at Jungle Bandha twin tanks, near Sirpur, Mahasumund District, Chhattisgarh State, sometime last winter (RKa) were good, as was a **Fire-capped Tit** *Cephalopyrus flammiceps* reported from Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur on 23rd February 2003 (per PV). Vagrants in the Goa area in January 2003 (AP,JP *et al.*/BWNT) included a single **Grey-headed Lapwing** *Vanellus cinereus*, seen and photographed at Carambolim Fields on 14th (several observers), a single **Oriental Pratincole** *Glareola maldivarum* seen and photographed amongst c.200 **Small Pratincoles** *G. lactea* at Morjim Beach on 14th (several observers), and a male **Pied Harrier** *Circus melanoleucos* at Baga Fields on 4th (several observers after this date).

At least 4,000 **Northern Pintails** *Anas acuta* on the Mandovi River, near Chorao Ferry on 15th, was a good high count. In the south, two male **Daurian Redstarts** *Phoenicurus aureus* were reported from below the Kalhatty checkpoint (c.1,500 m), on the downhill road to Mudumalai, c.14 km from Udhagamandalam (Ooty) on 17th December 2002 (CJH,G).

INDONESIA

Sumatra

Two male **Salvadori's Pheasants** *Lophura inornata* were seen along a dry ridge track near the 21.5 km mark from Sungei Penuh, on the Mauro Sako Road (1,250 m elevation) on 22nd August (RF), providing a new site record.

MALAYSIA

Peninsular Malaysia

Recent rarities have included a single **Cinereous Vulture** *Aegypius monachus* with migrating raptors, apparently only the second Malaysian record, at Taiping, Perak on 19th October (LKC,LSY), single juvenile **Steppe Eagles** *Aquila nipalensis* at Batang Tiga, Melaka on 29th December 2002 (NCB), and Sungai Balang, Johor on 14th January 2003 (YCA,YC), a single **Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus* at Pulau Redang, Terengganu on 7th July (MTO), three **Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoos** *Chrysococcyx basalis* and a single white morph **Red-footed Booby** *Sula sula* on Layang Layang Island, Kawasan Larangan, South China Sea during 4th–8th July (GN), the former perhaps the most northerly record to date, and the latter a new record for the island, a single **Black-headed Ibis** *Threskiornis melanocephalus* at Kuala Gula on 17th December 2002 (LHY,HR), perhaps the first since 1935, and a single adult **Black-collared Starling** *Sturnus nigricollis* in apparently perfect condition, at Tasek Industrial Estate, Ipoh, Perak during 18th–23rd September (OBY,PCM); several previous Malaysian records were thought likely to have been escapees. Around c.8,700 **Black Bazas** *Aviceda leuphotes*, counted migrating over Taman Lake View, Taiping on 10th November, may be the largest national count ever (LKC,LSY). Unseasonal were ten **Black-tailed Godwits** *Limosa limosa*, ten **Bar-tailed Godwits** *L. lapponica*, a single **Asian Dowitcher** *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, 50 **Great Knots** *Calidris tenuirostris*, and a single **Caspian Tern** *Sterna caspia* at Kapar Power Station, Selangor on 16th June (MTO/K). A calling **Abbott's Babbler** *Malacocincla abbotti* at c.1,100 m at Bukit Larut, Perak on 15th September (NCB)

was unusually high. Good breeding records were a female **Speckled Piculet** *Picumnus innominatus* excavating a nest-hole at Bukit Larut on 27th (G,KKF,YC) and 29th November (LSY,LKC,KKF,YC), a pair of **White-bellied Woodpecker** *Dryocopus javensis* with two dependent fledglings at Pondok Tanjung Forest Reserve, Selama, Perak on 16th June (KKF,YC), a pair of **Crested Goshawks** *Accipiter trivirgatus* nest-building at Royal Perak Golf Club, Ipoh, Perak on 14th September (CSC,LP), a nest of **Rufous-browed Flycatcher** *Ficedula solitaria* with two eggs at Bukit Larut on 12th July (G), a pair of **Ashy Tailorbirds** *Orthotomus ruficeps* feeding at least two dependent fledglings at Bandar Baru Bangi, Selangor during 21st July–2nd August (GN), a nest of **Streaked Wren Babbler** *Napothera brevicaudata* with two eggs at Bukit Larut on 4th January 2003 (NCB), and a pair of **Silver-eared Mesia** *Mesia argentauris* carrying food to an unseen nest at Fraser's Hill, Pahang on 3rd December 2002 (AWS,LKC,LSY).

MYANMAR

Further surveys in Kachin State, N Myanmar, during December 2001 (JV *et al.*) turned up two more new species for Myanmar and South-East Asia, a single **Horned Grebe** *Podiceps auritus* on the Irrawaddy River south of Myitkyina on 12th, and a single **Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria* along the Nam Lah River, near Putao on 21st. Additionally, two new species for Myanmar were observed; a flock of 12 **Dark-rumped Swifts** *Apus acuticauda* along the Nam Lah River on 21st, and

also some probables at Samo, south-west of Myitkyina on 13th, and a single **Slender-billed Gull** *Larus genei* photographed on the Irrawaddy River near Talawgyi, south of Myitkyina on 11th. Five species were apparently new for N Myanmar, at least 18 **Slender-billed Vultures** *Gyps tenuirostris* at a carcass north of Indawgyi Lake on 3rd, a single **Eastern Marsh Harrier** *Circus (aeruginosus) spilonotus* at Indawgyi Lake on 2nd, a single **Yellow Bittern** *Ixobrychus sinensis* at Indawgyi Lake on 1st, small numbers of **Crested Mynas** *Acridotheres cristatellus* at Indawgyi Lake on 3rd, and at least four **Sand Martins** *Riparia riparia* near the Nam Lah River on 20th. Also of interest were eight **Sarus Cranes** *Grus antigone* at Indawgyi Lake on 2nd/3rd, a single **Masked Finfoot** *Heliopais personata* at Nam Sam Chaung, south of Myitkyina on 8th, two **Mew Gulls** *L. canus* along the Irrawaddy south of Myitkyina on 6th, at least seven **White-rumped Vultures** *G. bengalensis* (including four north of Indawgyi Lake), a male **Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni* (apparently the first contemporary record) resting on the bank of the Irrawaddy River south of Myitkyina on 12th, four **Black-necked Grebes** *P. nigricollis* (including a single at Indawgyi Lake on 1st–3rd), two single **Black-crowned Night Herons** *Nycticorax nycticorax* in the vicinity of Indawgyi Lake on 1st and 4th, a total of nine **Hooded Treepies** *Crypsirina cucullata* along the Myitkyina-Putao Road during 17th–23rd (perhaps the most northerly records to date), one or two **White-tailed Stonechats** *Saxicola leucura* west of Putao on 19th (also a northward range extension), and a single **Beautiful Nuthatch** *Sitta formosa* along the Myitkyina-Putao Road on 16th. Interesting high counts at Indawgyi Lake during 1st–3rd included 980 **Tufted Ducks** *Aythya fuligula*, 1,275 **Purple Swampheens** *Porphyrio porphyrio*, 1,370 **Common Coots** *Fulica atra*, 61 **Green Sandpipers** *Tringa ochropus*, and 118 **Grey-headed Lapwings** *Vanellus cinereus*. A total of at least 244 **Black Storks** *Ciconia nigra*, at various locations during the survey, was also noteworthy. Interesting sightings from another recent trip to Myanmar (AO,NCh) included an impressive 83 **Sarus Cranes** *Grus antigone* near Wetlet (between Mandalay and Shwebo) on 28th January, the first to be noted in C Myanmar in recent times. 350 **Greylag Geese** *Anser anser*, 20 **Spot-billed Pelicans** *Pelecanus philippensis*, 60 **Asian Openbills** *Anastomus oscitans*, and 31 **Woolly-necked Storks** *Ciconia episcopus* were counted at Indawgyi Lake during 29th January–1st February 2003, and a pale morph **Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus* at Hlawga Park, near Yangon on 5th



Hooded Treepie *Crypsirina cucullata* by Hil Bruinsma

February, was the second record in two years from S Myanmar, suggesting that the species is perhaps more regular than was previously thought. Other good sightings were a single **Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo* at Bagan (AO,NCh *et al.*), and five **Asian House Martins** *Delichon dasypus* and a single calling **Pale-legged Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus tenellipes* at Pyome village, near Saw (AO,NCh *et al.*), both of which were new records for C Myanmar. Another interesting observation came from Inle Lake, Shan State, where a pair of **Indian Skimmers** *Rynchops albicollis* reportedly appeared in October. The birds were still there on 30th February 2003 (TZN). At an elevation of 1,300 m, Inle Lake is an unusually high location for this species.

NEPAL

There have been three new species for Nepal. The most exciting was **Tibetan Sandgrouse** *Syrrhaptes tibetanus* on the north-east of Damodarkunda, on the way to Bhrikuti Himal, Mustang District, Annapurna Conservation Area, with flocks of 11 on 19th (5,265 m elevation), 12 on 20th (5,400 m), and three on 21st (5,540 m) June (KS,NC,KSh,HKC,BN,KA,BS). The others came in the form of two **Purple-backed Starlings** *Sturnus sturninus* at Koshi Camp, Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve on 10th May and six the following day (SB,BC), and three **Moustached Warblers** *Acrocephalus melanopogon* (including one trapped and photographed) at Royal Sukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve on 22nd, 24th and 25th December 2002 (HB,TG,BC,SGC). The first breeding in Nepal of **Baillon's Crake** *Porzana pusilla* has been proven, with an adult observed feeding chicks at Kankali Temple, Saptari District, Koshi Barrage on 14th October (DG). **Slaty-legged Crake** *Rallina eurizonoides* has been seen in Royal Chitwan National Park in every year since 1986 (KT), arriving during late May/early June, and is known to breed, three or four chicks having been seen in November. Other noteworthy recent sightings have included a single **Grass Owl** *Tyto capensis* in the vicinity of Koshi Camp on 8th August (HC,KB), the first from the area, the first **Barn Owl** *T. alba* for Royal Chitwan NP, seen and photographed at Tharu Lodge, Sauraha (HS) on 31st January 2003 (there are very few records outside the Kathmandu Valley), a single **Saker Falcon** *Falco cherrug* north of Tatopani on 15th December 2002 (AH), several sightings of **Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus* in Sagarmatha National Park during November (PL), with four at Syangboche Yak Farm (3,800 m) on 16th, at least two between Syangboche and Khunde (3,840–

3,860 m) on 19th, and four between Syangboche and Khumjung (3,840 m) on 27th (all thought to possibly belong to the same flock), a single female **Blanford's Rosefinch** *Carpodacus rubescens* just below Ghorepani, Annapurna CA in December 2002 (NB), and a flock of eight **Finn's Weavers** *Ploceus megarhynchus* at Kosi Tappu on 30th October (HCh,BC,SGC), the first record away from Royal Sukla Phanta WR. A male **Oriental Magpie Robin** *Copsychus saularis* between Gumna and Lama Hotel, Langtang National Park on 17th May, was at the unusually high altitude of c.2,600 m (PSt), whilst flocks of up to 40 **Altai Accentors** *Prunella himalayana* and 200 **Plain Mountain Finches** *Leucosticte nemoricola* at Syaule Bazaar, below Ghandruk, Annapurna CA on 8th March 2002 were at the unusually low altitude of 1,300 m (TG).

PHILIPPINES

The only record received was of two **Forest Wagtails** *Dendronanthus indicus* near the entrance to Mount Makiling Botanical Gardens, Luzon on 25th or 26th December 2002 (YP,PCo,EC).

SRI LANKA

A male **Yellow-rumped Flycatcher** *Ficedula zanthopygia*, was seen in Yala National Park on 1st February 2003 (PV).

THAILAND

A trip to the mountain nearest the Border Patrol Post at Bang Lang Dam, in the Hala Sector of Hala-Bala Wildlife Sanctuary, during 23rd–31st August (AR,PR,WS,PSi,KSo,SmS,CT,STha/BB) recorded yet another new Malaysian montane bird for Thailand (at c.1,200 m): two **Blue Nuthatches** *Sitta azurea* in a bird-wave along with two new species for S Thailand, **Grey-chinned Minivet** *Pericrocotus solaris* and **Pygmy Blue Flycatcher** *Muscicapella hodgsoni*. Calls of a peacock pheasant, heard at two locations (c.1,100–1,200 m) were thought to be those of **Mountain Peacock Pheasant** *Polyplectron inopinatum*, a recent addition to the Thai list. In the extreme lowlands, around the dam catchment, a flock of 22 **Large Green Pigeons** *Treron capellei* was seen, along with an impressive 729 **Plain-pouched Hornbills** *Aceros subruficollis* flying to a roost. Single **Blue Nuthatches** were subsequently seen at 1,200 m on 12th September, and 1,400 m on 13th September, on the same mountain (STa). An even more remarkable new species for Thailand perhaps, was an **Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe*

isabellina reported from Kaeng Krachan on 25th March 2003 (C-AB). Further details are eagerly awaited. There were five **Ruddy Shelducks** *Tadorna ferruginea* on the Mekong River at Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai from 28th November (DD,MD) until at least 22nd February 2003 (KR,KW), and another two were seen at Laem Phak Bia, Phetchaburi on 28th September (PC,STha *et al.*). 56 **Cotton Pygmy-geese** *Nettapus coromandelianus* at Bang Khunthien, Bangkok on 7th December 2002 (NU) was the largest number counted anywhere near the city for a long while. Nong Bong Kai, Chiang Saen produced three **Tufted Ducks** *Aythya fuligula* and one or two **Common Pochards** *A. ferina* on 19th December 2002 (MM), and there was possibly a record count of 21 of the former there on 23rd February 2003 (KR,KW). A male **Plain-pouched Hornbill** was picked up shot in Bang Khram, Khao Nor Chuchi, Krabi on 7th October (YM) and was apparently recovering in captivity. Eight **Brown Hornbills** *Anorrhinus tickelli* were seen at a record elevation of c.1,800 m on Doi Khao Yai, Thung Yai Wildlife Sanctuary on 22nd December 2002 (STa). A single **Blyth's Kingfisher** *Alcedo hercules* was found upstream of Mae Fang National Park headquarters, Chiang Mai on 20th February 2003 (PR). This locality, like the only previous undoubted record more than 30 years ago, is in the Mekong Drainage. Good records from SE Thailand were a single **Chestnut-winged Cuckoo** *Clamator coromandus* behind Phrapokklao Hospital, Chanthaburi on 14th October (CTr), and a rufous morph **Oriental Scops Owl** *Otus sunia* at Mu 8, Tha Yang Subdistrict, Muang Distrust, Chumphon on 12th November (CN). A sighting of at least five **Blue-tailed Bee-eaters** *Merops philippinus* at Phuket airport on 12th February 2003 (WA), provided confirmation that some birds winter on the island. There were c.1,500 **Fork-tailed Swifts** *Apus pacificus* at Ko Pratong, Phang-nga on 13th January 2002, but not subsequently (WS). A pair of **Rose-ringed Parakeets** *Psittacula krameri* (presumably of captive origin) were nesting with other parakeets at Wat Chalerm Prakiat, Nonthaburi during late January to early February 2003 (SK,CTh). This is the second record (both breeding records) in recent years, and suggests that a small feral population is becoming established around Bangkok. Three **Vernal Hanging Parrots** *Loriculus vernalis* in a coconut palm on the beach at Ko Mak, Trat, on 9th February 2003 (CTh) were in a rather unusual habitat. A single **Pale-capped Pigeon** *Columba punicea* was roosting on a wooded island off Hat Nopparat Thara Beach, Krabi on 24th February



Pale-capped Pigeon *Columba punicea* by Craig Robson

2003 (IS), eight were also seen on Ko Pratong on 14th January and two on 19th January 2003 (WS). More surprisingly, other singles were found at Wat Khao Takhrao, Phetchaburi on 1st February (SKe,WS) and Chong Yen, Mae Wong, Kamphaengphet on 19th January 2003 (STa). An outstanding 174 were counted flying in to roost at Don Mamuang, near Chumphon, during November/December 2002 (PH,DWi). Other good pigeon records were seven **Orange-breasted Pigeons** *T. bicipincta* on Ko Pratong on 14th January 2003 (WS), and a male **Pompadour Green Pigeon** *T. pompadora* that appeared in a fig tree at Taling Chan, Bangkok on 6th December 2002 (PS). A major fall of migrants (thought to have been grounded by strong winds) was reported from Muang District, Chumphon, in the early morning of 4th November, when more than 100 birds were thought to have been recovered as tideline corpses, or in a moribund state. Among those identified were many **White-breasted Waterhens** *Amaurornis phoenicurus* (CN). Another fresh recovered migrant corpse was that of a **Slaty-legged Crake** *Rallina eurizonoides* at Samsen Nai, Bangkok on 6th November (Anon). A **Little Curlew** *Numenius minutus* at Samut Sakhon Mangrove Study Centre, on 27th September (SD,RJ) seems to have been a one-day wonder. A **Nordmann's Greenshank** *Tringa guttifer* was reported from Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park on 21st September (BCST), and three were photographed at Khok Kham on 7th December

2002 (PN). Also at Khok Kham was a probable juvenile **Little Stint** *Calidris minuta* on 12th October 2002 (MM), a full winter plumage bird on 19th October (PR), and a single bird on 8th–9th February 2003 (SD,SM/Wings). A **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper** *C. acuminata* was at Laem Phak Bia on 30th September (PS), and a **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* at Bang Saen, Chonburi on 28th September (PS), was apparently the first from SE Thailand. There were an estimated 30–40 **Eurasian Thick-knees** *Burhinus oedicnemus* at Ban Lat, Phetchaburi on 21st–22nd September (SK) and in the south, three **Beach Thick-knees** *Esacus neglectus* were found on Mu Ko Surin (one on Surin Nua and two on Surin Tai), Phang-nga during 9th–10th December 2002 (WS). There was a flurry of **Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta* records in September, with two at Ban Khao Takhrao, Phetchaburi on 18th–19th (BK), and singles reported from Wat Chong Lom, Samut Sakhon on 10th (WT), the nearby Mangrove Study Center on 25th–27th (SD,RJ) and Kalong (date not submitted; AJ,SBh). In Chumphon, a single **Grey-headed Lapwing** *Vanellus cinereus* was seen at Kaem Ling Nong Yai on 30th October (CN,WS), ten were there on 11th January 2003 (CN *et al.*), and four were seen migrating past nearby Tha Yang on 1st November (CN,PR). Further south, 14 were seen at Laem Son National Park, near Ranong during 31st January–2nd February 2003 (WA), and no fewer than 53 were counted at Laguna Golf Course, Phuket during 12th–13th February 2003 (WA). An amazing count of 368 was made between Sena and Bang Sai Districts, Ayutthaya on 4th January 2003 (MM). A **Long-tailed Jaeger** *Stercorarius longicaudus* was the most surprising oddity during the Chumphon raptor watch, passing through (overland) on the afternoon of 12th October (PCh,APi *et al.*). On the Mekong River at Chiang Saen, there was a single immature **Pallas's Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus* on 29th October (DJ,NU) and a

Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus* on 20th December 2002 (MM). A report of 1,000 **Lesser Crested Terns** *Sterna bengalensis* on mud-/sand-flats off Krabi on 14th December (PA,JL) would be the largest count ever made in Thailand, and 2,000 **Common Terns** *S. hirundo* were estimated the same day (PA,JL). The Khao Yoi to Ban Laem area of Phetchaburi produced an unexpected crop of *Aquila* eagles. Observations during 1st–22nd February 2003 (MM) revealed at least two **Imperial Eagles** *A. heliaca* and an immature **Steppe Eagle** *A. nipalensis*. No fewer than five **Booted Eagles** *Hieraetus pennatus* were seen at Tha Yang, Chumphon during the autumn 2002 raptor watch weekend: single dark morph and pale morph birds on 12th October, and three pale morphs on 13th October (many observers). The predominant species among the few thousand raptors which passed through was **Chinese Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter soloensis*, with c.3,000 reported. Also of interest were a few **Ospreys**, **Black Kites** *Milvus migrans*, **Eastern Marsh Harriers** *Circus (aeruginosus) spilonotus* and **Pied Harriers** *C. melanoleucos*. A **Hen Harrier** *C. cyaneus* and a **Greater Spotted Eagle** *A. clanga* were both reported, but no details supplied. One further pale morph **Booted Eagle** and a **Greater Spotted Eagle** passed through on 19th October (CN). Other noteworthy raptor records included **Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* along the road between Kaeng Krachan National Park and Pala-u on 28th July (P), a **Mountain Hawk Eagle** *Spizaetus nipalensis* on Ko Chang, Trat during December 2002 (JS,LS), perhaps the first from SE Thailand, single **Common Kestrels** *Falco tinnunculus* at Khao Nor Chuchi, Krabi on 12th October (NU), Laem Son NP south of Ranong during 31st January–2nd February 2003 (WA), and Phuket airport on 12th February 2003 (WA), an **Oriental Hobby** *F. severus* reported from Mu Ko Surin on 6th December 2002 (GA,NS), and an adult migrant race **Peregrine Falcon** *F. peregrinus* around Patong Beach, Phuket on 15th October (PR,SR). Large waterbirds were very well represented between July 2002 and February 2003. Four **Darters** *Anhinga melanogaster*, two **Great Cormorants** *Phalacrocorax carbo*, and a **Spot-billed Pelican** *Pelecanus philippensis* were reported from Bung Boraphet, Nakhon Sawan on 16th December (BBC), and the latter had increased to two on 4th January (DP,WS,SSu). There was also a report of three **Great Cormorants** on 1st January (STa) and two on 21st January (RJ,PKr). There were also at least ten **Indian Cormorants** *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis* on the latter date, a significant new distributional record, while **Darter** numbers had risen to six by 3rd February



Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* by Jan Wilczur

(DP,WS,KSor). Two **Darters** were also present on the Kaeng Krachan Reservoir, Phetchaburi on 19th December (KBu,PM,PP). Two **Chinese Egrets** *Egretta eulophotes* were seen off Dawn of Happiness Resort, north of Krabi, on 16th, 17th and 27th December, and four more were off Krabi town on 18th December (PA,JL). More significantly, a **Great-billed Heron** *Ardea sumatrana* was reported from Ko Stok, Ko Surin, Phang-nga on 15th–16th November (SP, TT). **Black-crowned Night Herons** *Nycticorax nycticorax* were nesting and **Black Bittern** *Dupetor flavicollis* present and probably breeding at Ban Huai Klod, Ban Sang District, Sa Kaeo, Prachinburi on 14th July (P). Two **Black-faced Spoonbills** *Platalea minor* which appeared at Wat Khao Takhrao, Phetchaburi on 21st January (SJ,SKe,YS) had increased to three by 24th (ST), and an amazing six birds by 16th February (UK). There were 16 **Black-headed Ibises** *Threskiomis melanocephalus* at Wat Kusarot, Sena District, Ayutthaya on 25th November (AJ,NL,SRu), three at Bung Boraphet on 21st December (CK), 11 at the same site on 3rd February (DP,YS, WS *et al.*), one at Khao Sam Roi Yot NP on 29th December (NU), and seven at Wat Khao Takhrao on 31st January (APi,PR). Bung Boraphet also produced 11 **Glossy Ibises** *Plegadis falcinellus* on 1st January (STa), nine on 4th January (DP,WS,SSe), and five on 3rd February (DP,YS,WS *et al.*). **Painted Storks** were particularly well reported: 50, including at least eight juveniles, were near Huai Talat Non Hunting Area, Buriram on 2nd July (CP), ten were at Sangkhlaburi, Kanchanaburi on 15th July (NP), three at Ban Khao Takhrao, on 19th September and seven on 25th September (BK), four over Muniti Maharat, Rangsit Khlong 6, Pathumthani on 13th October (PE), a single over the Chao Phraya River at Nonthaburi on 25th January (SK), and 24 at Bung Boraphet on 3rd February (SKe,DP,YS,WS,KSor). Of great interest was a **Greater Adjutant** *Leptoptilos dubius* at Wat Kusarot on 25th November (AJ,NL,SRu). A pair of **Black-and-yellow Broadbills** *Eurylaimus ochromalus* were seen in Thung Yai WS (reportedly at 925 m elevation) on 25th January 2003 (STa). An immature **Burmese Shrike** *Lanius collurio* in mangrove scrub at Laem Phak Bia on 8th September (PR,PS) was strange, and a late **Tiger Shrike** *L. tigrinus* was seen at Khok Kham on 1st June (SD). A **Golden-fronted Leafbird** *Chloropsis aurifrons* was seen at the unusually high elevation of 1,560 m on Doi Chiang Dao on 16th February 2003 (STa), as was a **Crow-billed Drongo** *Dicrurus annectans* at c.1,700 m on Doi Khao Yai, Thung Yai WS on 26th December 2002 (STa). Three **Red-**

billed Blue Magpies *Urocissa erythrorhyncha* on the Mahidol University Salaya Campus on 14th November (PR), are perhaps most likely to have originally been released from captivity, but were in good condition, and behaving naturally in a mixed plantation. Last winter, single male **Silver Orioles** *Oriolus mellianus* were found at Phu Soi Dao, Uttaradit on 3rd December (STa) and at the Huai Sai Leuang (Mae Pan Waterfall) Substation, Doi Inthanon National Park, Chiang Mai on 8th February (NBu,PMo,APr,NU *et al.*). Perhaps only the second and third records from the NW, the latter remained until at least 16th February (per PCh). An adult male **Mugimaki Flycatcher** *Ficedula mugimaki* was reported from Doi Khao Yai, Thung Yai WS on 26th December 2002 (STa), and two more males were present on Khao Khieo, Khao Yai National Park on 7th January 2003 (KingBird). Single male **Slaty-backed Flycatchers** *Ficedula hodgsonii* were reported from Huai Phrom Din Sai on 21st October (ST), and Lum Bak Ngam on 24th November (STa), both in Nam Nao National Park, Phetchabun. A **Rufous-tailed Robin** *Luscinia sibilans*, reported from Doi Pha Hom Pok on 10th January 2003 (STa) was noteworthy, whilst an adult male **Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros*, only Thailand's second, appeared at Mae Jo, Chiang Mai on 19th November (PT, RK), and was still present at the end of February (per RK). **Chestnut-cheeked Starlings** *Sturnus philippensis* kept up a presence at the Municipal Sports Ground, Chumphon almost throughout last winter, with an adult and an immature on 28th October (CN), the latter still present the following day, one bird on 2nd November (CN), a male on 8th November, 6th–17th December and 5th–6th January (CN), two males on 25th–29th December (CN), a male and two females on 7th January (CN,WS), and a male on 5th February (CN,PR,ST). Also of great interest here were four presumed *malabaricus* race **Chestnut-tailed Starlings** *S. malabaricus* on 27th November (CN), and least two on 7th January and 5th February (CN,ST,PR), perhaps the first recorded from Thailand, and peak numbers of *nemicola* race birds on 11th January (CN), when 100 were counted, an unexpectedly large number this far south. Eight of the latter were also found further south at Laem Son NP, near Ranong during 31st January–2nd February 2003 (WA). 149 **Purple-backed Starlings** *S. sturninus* were also present at the Chumphon site on 27th September (CN), and at least ten remained for most of the winter (CN). There was a spate of **Rosy Starling** *S. roseus* records, with a juvenile at Chumphon on 7th October (CN), 29th October to 1st

November (CN,WS,PR) and 11th January (CN), and singles at Bang Pu on 26th January 2003 (DP,WS,SSe), Den Ya Khat, Doi Chiang Dao WS on 7th January (STa), and Mae Taeng Irrigation Project, Chiang Mai on 20th February 2003 (Wings); the latter two the first from NW Thailand. Three **Common Starlings** *S. vulgaris* were reported from Bung Boraphet on 16th December 2002 (BBC), a single on 21st December (CK) and 1st January (STa), and two on 29th December (CTh) and 4th January 2003 (DP,WS,SSu). A count of over 50 **Asian Pied Starlings** *S. contra* flying eastwards over paddies at Doi Saket on 16th February 2003 (Wings) is the largest number reported from the Chiang Mai area in the past couple of decades. The wave of **Vinous-breasted Starlings** *S. burmannicus* colonising and advancing down the peninsula appears to be gathering strength, and at least 50 were found in a single pre-roost gathering at Tha Chana, Surat Thani on 11th October (APi,PR,SR). 23 **Fire-capped Tits** *Cephalopyrus flammiceps* found in peach orchards at Doi Inthanon NP during the 8th–9th February 2003 (per RK,LBC) had risen to any amazing 80 birds by 20th February (APi). There were five **Red-whiskered Bulbuls** *Pycnonotus jocosus* at Mu Ban Phudaan, Nong Khaem, Bangkok on 5th November (RJ). Two **Aberrant Bush Warblers** *Cettia flavolivacea* were reported from Phu Soi Dao, Uttaradit on 16th November (BB), and a **Blunt-winged Warbler** *Acrocephalus concinens* reported from Tha Yang District, Chumphon on 25th January 2003 (CN) requires documentation, since there are no previous records so far south in the peninsula. **Yellow-streaked Warbler** *Phylloscopus armandii* was seen at Lum Bak Ngam, Nam Nao NP on 21st November (STa). Other good distributional records from Doi Khao Yai, the highest mountain in Thung Yai WS, during 24th–26th December 2002 (STa), were two **Slaty-backed Flycatchers** *Ficedula hodgsonii*, a male **Pygmy Blue Flycatcher** *Muscicapella hodgsoni* and, most significantly, a male **Mrs Gould's Sunbird** *Aethopyga gouldiae*. New distributional records from Doi Phu Kha (1,870 m), Nan in February 2003 were two **Black-breasted Thrushes** *Turdus dissimilis* on 10th, at least three **Spectacled Barwings** *Actinodura ramsayi*, and eight **Red-faced Liocichlas** *Liocichla phoenicea* (STa). Pride of place however, undoubtedly goes to three **Beautiful Nuthatches** *Sitta formosa* seen at 1,940 m on 8th February (STa), only the second Thai record. This new site may well prove a better place to search for the species than Doi Pha Hom Pok, where attempts to refind it have consistently failed. A female **Siberian**

Thrush *Zoothera sibirica* claimed on the 10th (STa) would be an exceptional mid-winter record. Other good babbler records were **Eyebrowed Wren Babbler** *Napothera epilepidota* in the Hala section of Hala-Bala WS on 12th and 14th September (SSo,STa), and seven to ten **Short-tailed Parrotbills** *Paradoxornis davidianus* at Phu Soi Dao on 17th November (BB). A single **Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca* was found at Km 30, Doi Inthanon NP on 27th November (GA,NS). A flock of no fewer than 100 **Red Avadavats** *Amandava amandava* was reported from Ban Sangha Ngam, Tambol Samet, Muang District, Buriram on 20th July (CP). Finally, a **Rosy Pipit** *Anthus roseatus* was found at Doi Saket, c.10 km east of Chiang Mai town on 14th January 2003 (KingBird). New data were provided by the following breeding records from last winter: a pair of **Lesser Yellownapes** *Picus chlorolophus* entering a nest-hole, and thought to be incubating, at Thung Yai WS on 30th January (STa), a **Golden-fronted Leafbird** *Chloropsis aurifrons* feeding a fledged juvenile at Doi Inthanon NP on 10th September (APi), **Velvet-fronted Nuthatch** *Sitta frontalis* entering a nest-hole and incubating at Thung Yai WS on 29th January (STa), a pair of **Great Tits** *Parus major* nest-building at Doi Pha Chang, Nan on 8th December (STa), another carrying food by Doi Inthanon NP headquarters on 14th January (KingBird), a pair of **Yellow-cheeked Tits** *P. sibilonotus* nest-building on the Kiew Mae Paan Trail, Doi Inthanon NP on 11th January (STa), an occupied nest of **Streak-eared Bulbul** *Pycnonotus blanfordi* in Bangkok during December (BM), **Black-throated Laughingthrush** *Garrulax chinensis* feeding a single fledgling at Km 26, Kaeng Krachan NP on 27th August (KW), five nests of **Abbott's Babblers** *Malacocincla abbotti* (most with young) at Khao Yai NP during January–February (GG,APi), **White-hooded Babbler** feeding young in a nest at Thung Yai WS on 30th January, and **White-bellied Yuhina** nest-building at Thung Yai WS on 25th January (STa).

VIETNAM

BirdLife surveys along Serepok River up to the Vietnam/Cambodia border, in Yok Don National Park, Dak Lak in November or December 2002 turned up a very interesting new species for Vietnam, **Mekong Wagtail** *Motacilla samveasnae* (LTT). **Grey-headed Fish Eagle** *Ichthyophaga ichthyaeetus* and **Brown Hornbill** were also reported. A more surprising new bird for Vietnam was a male **Grey-headed Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula erythaca*, seen and tape-recorded at Tam Dao

National Park, Vinh Phuc, E Tonkin on 13th January 2003 (DV,BDM). There is perhaps a slim possibility that it may have escaped from captivity. Other good species at Tam Dao last winter included a female **Dusky Thrush** *Turdus naumanni* on 7th January 2003 (CR *et al.*/Birdquest), a single *stresemanni* **Black Bulbul** *Hypsipetes leucocephalus* on 20th March and a singing **Grey-bellied Tesia** *Tesia cyaniventer* seen well on 22nd March 2003 (CR *et al.*/Birdquest), the latter two apparently new for E Tonkin. A little further south at Cuc Phuong National Park, an adult **Steppe Eagle** was seen heading north on 13th March (CR *et al.*/Birdquest), single male **Japanese Robins** *Luscinia akahige* were found on 31st December 2002 (GR) and 7th January 2003 (DV), and the sighting of a pair of **Oriental Pied Hornbills** *Anthracoceros albirostris* near the headquarters on 15th March was heart-warming (MA,CR *et al.*/Birdquest). Recent rarities at Xuan Thuy National Park, Red River Delta have included two **Oriental Plovers** *Charadrius veredus* on 17th March (WR,MA,CR *et al.*/Birdquest), three males and a female **Falcated Duck** *Anas falcata* on 18th, a single **Eurasian Spoonbill** with **Black-faced Spoonbills** on 19th January 2003 (DV,EV,BDM), and a single **Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax* in a flock of up to 900 **Wood Sandpipers** *Tringa glareola* in Giao Thuy District, south of the delta on 17th–18th March (CR *et al.*/Birdquest). In W Tonkin, at Lo Qui Ho (O Que Ho), near Sa Pa, at least 70 **Bramblings** *Fringilla montifringilla* were seen on 23rd January (DV), and a single **Chinese Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus sichuanensis* on 31st January 2003 (EV), was new for W Tonkin. **White-winged Magpie** *Urocissa whiteheadi* was found near the summit of Bach Ma National Park in February 2003 (EV), c.100 m higher than the previously documented limit in South-East Asia. Three apparent new species for S Annam were



Pin-tailed Parrotfinches *Erythrura prasina*
by Hil Bruinsma

observed at Duc Trong Marsh, between Di Linh and Da Lat, on 6th March 2003 (CR *et al.*/Birdquest), two **Common Snipes** *Gallinago gallinago*, a female **Greater Painted-snipe** *Rostratula benghalensis*, and a single **Eastern Marsh Harrier**. 15 **Pin-tailed Parrotfinches** *Erythrura prasina* feeding on seeding bamboo at Deo Nui San, south of Di Linh on 7th March (CR *et al.*/Birdquest) were also the first from S Annam, and a single male **Orange-breasted Green Pigeon** *Treron bicincta* at Tuyen Lam, near Da Lat on 4th March was at the unusually high altitude of c.1,400 m. Interesting breeding records included a pair of **Red-billed Scimitar Babblers** *Pomatorhinus ochraceiceps* with a recently fledged juvenile at Deo Nui San on 7th March (CR *et al.*/Birdquest)

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Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*
by Seb Buckton

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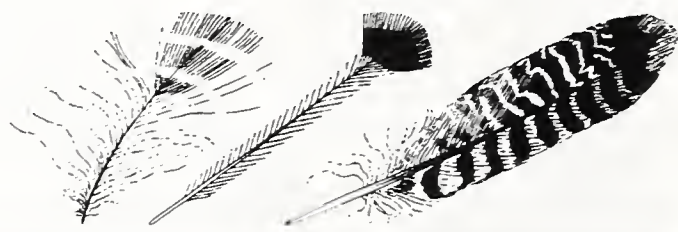
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Stray Feathers



Request for data on birds of Myanmar

The newly founded Myanmar Bird and Nature Society is trying to establish a database of bird sightings from their country. The society, which aims to raise interest in birds, and nature in general, among the population of Myanmar, would be thankful for any trip-report or bird list from foreign birdwatchers who have been to Myanmar in the past. Right now Myanmar is not among the top birding destinations in SE-Asia but still the number of birdwatchers who visit the country increases steadily. Most of their sightings remain in their notebooks or are published in journals that may not be accessible to Myanmar birders. Therefore it would be of great help if anyone visiting the country on a birding trip could send in his or her observations to one of the following addresses: Aaron Ofner, Baumgasse 6, 8280 Fuerstenfeld, Austria. E-mail: aaron.ofner@gmx.at or U Nyein Chan, No. 69 Myaynigone Zay Street, Sanchaung Township, Yangon 11111, Myanmar. E-mail: SST@mptmail.net.mm.

Formation of Nepal Rare Birds Committee

The newly formed Nepal Rare Birds Committee, which will be administered by BCN, will consider all new species records for Nepal and all records of species that have been recorded five times or fewer. The aims are to have a system of maintaining an

official Nepal bird list that is accepted by ornithologists and birdwatchers throughout Nepal and internationally and to ensure that fair credit and acknowledgement are given to all observers concerned. A rarities report will be published annually in *Danphe*, BCN's newsletter, and will include details of all accepted records and a list of rejected records. Observers are urgently requested to send in full details of all their relevant records from October 2002 onwards to Bird Conservation Nepal. There are six committee members: Dr Hem Sagar Baral, Tika Giri, Tim Inskipp, Hem Subedi and Kalu Ram Tamang with Carol Inskipp as chairperson of the committee. A majority of five out of six will be needed to accept records. All observers will be informed about the committee's decision as soon

as possible after records are submitted. Please send all records either direct to Bird Conservation Nepal, POBox 12465, Lazimpat, Kathmandu, Nepal. E-mail: bcn@mail.com.np or to Carol Inskipp at 1 Herneside, Welney, Wisbech, Cambs PE14 9SB, UK E-mail: tc.inskipp@which.net

Asian Raptor Symposium

The 3rd Symposium on Asian Raptors will be held in Kenting, Taiwan on October 10-13, 2003 and is to be hosted by the Raptor Research Group of Taiwan (RRGT). The main themes of the symposium will be raptor migration, population and ecology of Asian raptors, raptor conservation and others. For more information on the symposium, please visit the website: <http://raptor.org.tw/3rd/3index.htm>



Grey-bellied Tesia *Tesia cyaniventer* by Craig Robson

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Guidelines for contributors

Whilst the Editor is always pleased to discuss possible contributions with potential authors, and to advise on preparation, it would be helpful if the following guidelines could be adhered to:

1. **Articles** These should be written clearly, preferably typed, on one side of the page, with all lines double-spaced, leaving wide margins, and should be no longer than 2,000 words. Scientific names should appear at the first mention of each species or, if all species appear in a table, they may be given there instead. Scientific names should, where possible, follow T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey and W. Duckworth (1996) *An annotated checklist of the birds of the Oriental Region*.

Any tables to accompany articles should be prepared on separate pieces of paper, and be thoroughly checked. Titles of tables should be self-explanatory. Diagrams should be clearly drawn, in ink, ideally 15 cm wide and 11 cm high. References should be cited in the order in which they appear during the paper in the same style used in this Bulletin.

It would be helpful if two copies of each contribution could be submitted, and also if possible the text submitted on a computer disk, ideally in Microsoft Word, in either PC or Macintosh format.

2. **From the field** These should follow the format in the current edition of the OBC Bulletin, and be sent to the Bulletin Editor, OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK.
3. **News/Information** Typed or handwritten contributions should be sent to the Bulletin Editor, OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK.

Although every effort is made to retain all articles in their submitted form, the Editorial Committee reserves the right to make changes that it deems necessary, and, in a minimum of cases, without prior reference to the author. It is assumed that all contributors submitting material understand and accept these conditions. All contributors, photographers and artists, in submitting material for the OBC Bulletin, also give permission for their work to be used in the OBC Internet pages.

For Around the Orient, Recently Published, Stray Feathers and Free Press, the deadline for submission of material is 28th February (Spring Bulletin) and 31st August (Autumn Bulletin). The deadlines do not apply to main articles which will be published as soon as possible after acceptance by the Editorial Committee.

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“...these binoculars are truly a wonder of modern optics”

– Bill Oddie, Broadcaster



Anyone who has watched *Birding with Bill Oddie* or *Bill Oddie Goes Wild*, knows his optical equipment is sometimes subjected to some appalling conditions. “LEICA observation equipment is completely waterproof and *never* steams up at the crucial moment. I value the close focussing as I often want to look at butterflies and insects, as well as birds”, says Bill. The LEICA 8x42 BN binoculars offer 3.10m / 10.2ft close focussing. A 5.25mm exit pupil for precise observation in poor light. Nitrogen filled, gas-tight body. Watertight to 5 metres. Spectacle-friendly eyecups. 30 year warranty and the world-recognised LEICA red spot. Bill adds: “I was out with friends who used LEICA Trinovid binoculars and I asked to try them. I haven’t used anything but LEICA since”. Available at your LEICA dealer.

www.leica-camera.com



my point of view